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A LEGO Technic structure is built on a grey base plate. It features a red 1x3 brick at the bottom, a white 1x2 brick with a black circular hole, and a blue 1x2 brick on top. A black cable is looped around the structure, secured with black rubber bands. A black pin is inserted into the top of the blue brick.

# LEGO® for University Learning: Inspiring Academic Practice in Higher Education

Chrissi Nerantzi & Alison James

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# **LEGO® for University Learning: Inspiring Academic Practice in Higher Education**

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### **A few words about this booklet**

This booklet is a practical guide; it brings together the thoughts and experiences of the editors and colleagues across the UK who use LEGO bricks, or the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method to develop student learning, academic and professional practice and research. It has been produced as a resource for academic developers and others who would like to start using such approaches in their own higher education contexts but need some additional ideas. While it celebrates the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach it makes a clear distinction between this method and other activities inspired by its principles and practices. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has territory in common with other creative methodologies which also use materials, metaphor and story. Suggestions are made as to how such other activities may be intertwined with the use of LEGO.

### **Authors**

Chrissi Nerantzi and Alison James

**Contributors:** Dr Stephen Powell, Neil Withnell, Sue Watling, Graham Barton, Lesley Raven, Haleh Moravej, Prof. Dr Tobias Seibl, Dr Thanassis Spyriadis, Dr Sean McCusker, Lisa Higgings, Sue Beckingham, Prof. Rebecca Lawthom and Dr Catherine Hayes.

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Note: Part 1 of this booklet is based on the following short paper made available under a creative commons licence CC BY for the OER14 Conference: Nerantzi, C. & McCusker, S. (2014) A taster of the LEGO® Serious Play® Method for Higher Education, OER14 Building Communities of Open Practice, Conference Proceedings, 28-29 April 2014, Centre for Life, Newcastle, United Kingdom.

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### **Cover design**

The cover is based on a LEGO® model Chrissi created at the end of her LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Facilitator training. She still has this mini model on her desk. It encapsulates her holistic understanding of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, and what can be achieved through this flexible creative method. The cover has been designed by Adam Frank and Ben Davies.

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## About the authors, notes and resources

**Chrissi Nerantzi** (@chrissinerantzi) is a Principal Lecturer in academic CPD in the University Teaching Academy, UTA (until March 2019 known as the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, CELT) at Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. She feels passionate about the use of creative, innovative and open approaches to learning, teaching and research that have the power to stimulate engagement, learning, boost confidence and build community. Chrissi is an accredited facilitator of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and has experience using the method in a wide range of HE contexts with staff and students and, has carried out related research. She has developed a range of workshops and short courses based on the principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. She is often invited to support colleagues and facilitate tailor-made workshops and courses with staff and students using this method. Her research interests are in the area of creativity, innovation and open education. Chrissi is a National Teaching Fellow, a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Staff and Educational Development Association. She was awarded the Learning Technologist of the Year 2017 by the Association for Learning Technology and in 2018 received the Award for Best Open Research Practice by the Global OER Graduate Network. For more information about Chrissi, please visit <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chrissinerantzi>.

**Alison James** (@alisonrjames) is a Professor of Learning and Teaching at the University of Winchester, a National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK. She is co-author, with Stephen D. Brookfield, of *Engaging Imagination: helping students become creative and reflective thinkers*, published by Jossey Bass in 2014. Her longstanding interests in higher education are the use and development of creative and alternative approaches to tertiary learning. In particular she has explored these in relation to curriculum design, critical and self-reflection and in multidisciplinary contexts. Alison is an accredited facilitator of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and produced a report for the Higher Education Academy on her work using LEGO in the creative arts in 2015, available online at <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/innovating-creative-arts-lego> Although the context for this report was art and design, as the creators of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® themselves make clear, the method crosses all disciplinary boundaries.

### **Alison meets Chrissi**

Alison's and Chrissi's professional paths joined when they first met in Bristol at the annual Staff and Educational Development Association conference in 2013. Their love for playfulness in learning and teaching connected them. Since then, Alison and Chrissi have been working together on a range of projects. One of them is the issue of *Creative Academic Magazine: Exploring Play in HE*. Their biggest project is the edited book, *The Power of Play: Creativity in Tertiary Learning* was published by Palgrave MacMillan in early 2019. Together they also co-edited the following special issue:

Nerantzi, C. & James, A. (eds.) (2018) *Discovering innovative applications of LEGO® in learning and teaching in higher education*, Special Issue, International Journal of Management and Applied Research, Vol. 5, No. 4. Available at <http://ijmar.org/v5n4/toc.html>

It is hoped that this booklet will help practitioners and researchers familiarise themselves with how LEGO may be used in tertiary learning. In particular it considers the principles and structure of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and how using this creative method and others inspired by it can form part of our academic repertoire. As with any pedagogic resource or approach, judicious use of it and a clear sense of its academic purpose should be the main driver. With specific regard to the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method or related approaches we advocate taking care to allow enough time and space to reap its benefits, if you want to explore issues in depth. This does not mean that you cannot use LEGO bricks for quick activities and simpler outcomes, just that such activities are different. We suggest that there is also a happy balance to be achieved in terms of its frequency of use. As with anything, used too often there is a risk that participants become jaded with it; however, when used sufficiently frequently staff and students have the opportunity to build on their skills in using it – just as they would when developing other capabilities.



## Notes

As David Gauntlett sets out in the [2010 Open Source Guide to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®](#), the method and its materials were originally restricted in use to trained facilitators. Since 2010 the LEGO Group has made the method available under a Creative Commons licence ('Attribution Share Alike': see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/> for licence details) with regard to two aspects of the method:

1. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® basic principles and philosophy, upon which everything else is built;
2. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® materials – sets of specially selected LEGO® bricks and pieces;

A welcome was extended to the method's international community of users to develop new applications, some of which could be shared online. It is in this spirit that we and our fellow contributors share this booklet and is in accordance with the position stated in June 2010 whereby the originators of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® became open to 'creative uses of these tools, and innovation in the community' (Gauntlett, 2010).

We should note, however, that within the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® community robust warnings circulate as to the care that must be taken when referring to activities using LEGO® as LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. (There is also a publication setting out the legal basis protecting the LEGO trademark which you can find here: <https://www.lego.com/r/www/r/seriousplay/-/media/serious%20play/pdf/2017/lego%20serious%20play%20trademark%20guidelines%20version%202017.pdf?l.r2=527136104>)

The two main principles of use for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® are set out in the Open Source booklet and can effectively be summarised as follows. One is that activities closely following the applications and principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® as set out in their training courses and materials can be called LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. Anything that uses LEGO® but deviates noticeably from these systematic applications should not.

One way in which this difference might be seen is in terms of time; the systematic activity schedule of a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop set out in training manuals and other documents requires anything from 3-4 hours to 1-2 days to be implemented. Another is that specific bricks are used for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. We write as advocates of the method and as academics who respect ownership and copyright; we therefore pass on here awareness of any caution required and also are careful to comply with such strictures ourselves. However, as creative educators we also know that some of the principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® are shared by other methods (metaphor and storytelling, for example and the use of a 'mediating artefact' to explore experience or knowledge). We are also supporters of innovation – believing that even the best approaches can also benefit from imaginative interpretation and modification. Furthermore, we are realists; the time and resource constraints of HE often mean that activities have to be completed within much shorter time periods than those we would like to have the luxury of. Limited finances

also mean that we cannot always provide new, bespoke kits for every activity; we therefore turn to the materials that we have close at hand, or can re-use. We endeavour to make clear in this booklet where we are referring to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in its pure form, where we are discussing LEGO-related activities which are different to this – and where we are suggesting blurring the lines and combining such approaches with other creative methods and materials. However, with many contributing voices this may be more obvious at some times than at others. We ask you as reader to bear these distinctions in mind as you navigate the various stories and examples.

## Resources

Further detailed information about the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method can be found in the following sites and publications:

Professor Johan Roos and Professor Bart Victor have written an excellent backdrop to how they came to create the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method, and this is the perfect place to start. You can find their article in our special issue of the International Journal of Management and Applied Research under:

Roos, J. and Victor, B. (2018), "How It All Began: The Origins Of LEGO® Serious Play®", *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 326-343. <https://doi.org/10.18646/2056.54.18-025>

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method has been described in detail in the following open source guide by Prof. David Gauntlett:

The LEGO Group (2010). *Open-source/Introduction to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®*, available at [http://davidgauntlett.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/LEGO\\_SERIOUS\\_PLAY\\_OpenSource\\_14mb.pdf](http://davidgauntlett.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/LEGO_SERIOUS_PLAY_OpenSource_14mb.pdf)

David is perhaps the most prominent user of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in a university context and has been working for many years with the LEGO Group and others to explore the use of LEGO®. Access his website at <http://davidgauntlett.com/portfolio/lego-collaborations/> where you will out more about David's LEGO® related activities, projects and publications.

Other publications in a context broader than HE include

Kristiansen, P. and Rasmussen, R. (2014) *Building a better business using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Blair, S. and Rillo, M. (2016) *SERIOUS WORK. How to facilitate meetings & workshops using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method*, ProMeet.

Within HE specifically, Chrissi and Alison have also written extensively about, and disseminated, their thinking about the use of LEGO-related approaches. To illustrate, Alison's HEA report in the series [Innovative pedagogies series: Innovating in the Creative Arts with LEGO](#), provides an introduction to the use of LEGO and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in a specific higher education context (James, 2015).

Chrissi has created a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® section on the University Teaching Academy's, UTA (previously the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, CELT) website of Manchester Metropolitan University. This introduces the method and provides access to further resources and research. It can be accessed at [http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/teaching/lego\\_sp.php](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/teaching/lego_sp.php)

As mentioned already, Alison and Chrissi edited a Special Issue around the use of LEGO® in Higher Education and this can be accessed at

Nerantzi, C. and James, A. (eds.) (2018) *Discovering innovative applications of LEGO® in learning and teaching in higher education*, Special Issue, International

Journal of Management and Applied Research, Vol. 5, No. 4, Available at <http://ijmar.org/v5n4/toc.html>. <https://doi.org/10.18646/2056.54>

These publications are useful for in a higher education context together with a growing body of research in this area (see <https://b4bricks.org/il-metodo-lego-serious-play/academic-publication/> for a selection).

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all practitioners who contributed their stories and especially Dr Stephen Powell, Neil Withnell, Sue Watling, Graham Barton, Lesley Raven, Prof. Dr Tobias Seibl, Dr Thanassis Spyriadis, Sue Beckingham, Dr Sean McCusker, Lisa Higgings, Haleh Moravej, Prof. Rebecca Lawthom as well as Alison Laithwaite, Dr Gayle Impey, Dr Maren Deepwell, Tom Palmer, Dr Charles Neame and Dr Bea de los Arcos for commenting on specific LEGO(R) SERIOUS PLAY(R) activity prompts. Finally, we would like to thank especially Prof. Johan S. Roos for writing the prologue and Prof. Sally Brown for writing the epilogue for this booklet.

### **Prologue by Professor Johan S. Roos: LSP is about freedom**

Mark Twain's memorable character Huckleberry Finn wants to be free of social conventions. Perhaps more than anything Huck wants to think independently, follow the moral intuitions of his heart, that is, to be himself. Huck finds his freedom in nature and by moving around a lot.

It difficult not to sympathise with Huck, especially if you delight from creative and expressive arts-like methods, like LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP). Two decades ago I too wanted to break free from conventions and imposed norms, in my case, traditional executive education. Inviting managers from serious multinational companies to present they ideas and case solutions as hand-made LEGO® constructions instead of on flip-charts and slides noticeably broke quite a few conventions.

On the surface, what I did challenged both the traditional mode assumed in such conversations (work-like; productive; serious) and medium of communication (two-dimensional; paper-based). More profoundly, the new approach encouraged the imagination and integrated cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of people interacting. In other words, in our micro-cosmos and at that time and place, I was enabling these managers to think beyond conventions, to be more themselves, and to see the same in a different way and together create entirely new insights. To some extent, I intentionally set them free. It worked, and the rest is history.

Two decades later I am delighted to see how the LSP method has spread throughout the world. There are many capable facilitators, so many participants of LSP-enabled workshops, and so much valuable experience to learn from. This is why I have initiated a major research project on how LSP help readiness of change, and will continue to do research on LSP-related activities in organizations.

This practical guide may not be “approved, authorised or endorsed by the LEGO Group,” but I am sure the freedom it represents is endorsed and welcomed by many people in the UK and beyond, in higher education and elsewhere. LSP is still breaking conventions in organizations, industries and countries and I hope it continues to help set people a little more free. Just remember: LSP is about freedom.

Johan S. Roos

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& Co-inventor of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®  
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## Overview

This booklet provides an introduction into how LEGO-based approaches, such as the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method, can be used for learning in Higher Education (HE) contexts. It is illustrated by practitioners' stories from different disciplines and higher education institutions. These evidence the diversity of ways in which the principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® can be applied across disciplines to make learning and teaching stimulating and engaging. A section with a range of prompts for learning and teaching activities, that can be applied and adapted further have been included. Furthermore, we offer suggestions for the professional development of a wide range of colleagues in HE; academics and others who teach, researchers, coaches and mentors, educational developers, learning technologists and many more. Ways in which to extend, integrate or repurpose principles which inform the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method are also explored towards the end of this booklet.

While we are accredited facilitators and can share our experiences and ideas of the method, we are not accredited trainers of other facilitators. We advise academic practitioners who are keen to use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to also participate in specialist development workshops or courses to learn the fundamentals of the method.

We also recommend that in your early days of learning a systematic approach such as LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® you follow the standard method so as to embed your grasp of its principles and potential effects. Navigating a highly engaging but all-encompassing approach will take attention and energy as you start to work out where you might adjust or reshape your sessions. You will quickly learn that while you can plan a session meticulously you cannot pre-empt everything that people will say and build. While you might find that familiar symbols recur in terms of people's metaphorical building (e.g. bridges for connection, travel, development), people will surprise you by their inventiveness in building and in the things that they may say. This method, properly applied, can challenge you and your participants in ways that neither you nor they may anticipate.

As part of your own development with the method reflecting on facilitation experiences, asking for participants' and colleagues' feedback, will be invaluable. In addition, adopting an evidence-based approach and engaging in related research activities, will also help you to develop and refine practice and generate ideas on further study and use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® that can be shared with the wider academic community.

Booklet structure:

- Part 1 Background and Method
- Part 2 Stories
- Part 3 Activity prompts
- Part 4 Variations
- Part 5 Directory of accredited facilitators

## **PART 1: Background and Method**

This section provides an introduction to the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method as well as to the potential of some of its applications for learning and teaching in higher education. For much fuller information you can read any of the texts listed in our opening section. There are many more publications besides out there to help you move forward.

### **1.1 How LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® started**

If you want the story ‘from the horse’s mouth’ then you must read Roos and Victor’s article from the IJMAR Journal (Roos and Victor, 2018).

What follows here is our story in shorthand. The first use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® was largely in the business world, for strategic planning, team building and identity workshops. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has transformed business meetings and decision-making in the companies who have embraced it (Novo Nordisk, Harco Technology, ABSA and VodaCom). Over the last decade or so, use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in education has also been increasing (Gauntlett, 2007; Frick *et al.* 2013; James, 2013; James & Brookfield 2014; Nerantzi & Despard 2014; Nerantzi, C. & McCusker 2014; James 2015; Nerantzi, Moravej & Johnson, 2015; Nerantzi & James, 2018; James & Nerantzi (eds.) 2019).

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® was developed out of a dissatisfaction with the outcome of strategic meetings. There was an urgency to find new ways that would activate innovative thinking and creative problem solving especially when the LEGO company was facing problems such as strong competition from digital toy makers threatening its existence in the mid 1990s (Frick *et al.*, 2013). LEGO® was seeking a way to empower individuals and teams and use their ideas to make the company stronger and thrive in a rapidly changing market. Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, the CEO of LEGO® at the time, recognised that strategic meetings needed to be transformed into exciting idea generating events that empowered participants. LEGO® looked towards its own bricks as a tool to enable its people to come up with innovative solutions.

The original team of Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, together with Johan Roos and Bart Victor from the IMD Business School in Lausanne, had shared values and recognised the urgency and necessity of an alternative approach for strategic decision making. They started development of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and were keen to make it available beyond the LEGO® organisation and market it as a product.

Based on the research and development work by Johan Roos and Bart Victor, including many experiments with many executives at the Imagination Lab Foundation, the method was officially launched in 2002 by Executive Discovery, a subsidiary of the LEGO® Company. Robert Rasmussen was brought onboard 2000 by the CEO of Executive Discovery, Bart Victor, to help him improve the product, Imaginopedia and training process for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitators. In 2010, the company decided to make the method open source under a Creative Commons v 3.0 licence, which more rapidly across the globe, transforming practices at a much larger scale. Training in the method is today provided by certified facilitators who have completed the original training with the LEGO Company, and others.



Specialist LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® kits are sold by LEGO® to be used for systematically designed applications which require all participants to have access to certain kinds of bricks. What we will show in this booklet is that it is possible to use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approaches using non-standard bricks, and that also once you have mastered the principles of the method you will find your own imaginative ways to apply these.

### **1.2 The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process**

The full detail of the process is painstakingly set out in materials which are made available through official training programmes. Even if you have dabbled with the method and its principles already undertaking this training does add significant dimensions to your ability to use it. More and more higher education practitioners are completing the certified LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® training or other LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® development workshops and courses and are keen to use it in their practice. This enables wider engagement and experimentation which further opens up new possibilities for our understanding of the method in a higher education context.

What follows here is a condensed version of its principles.

The process is premised on the idea that the solution is in the system and the answers are in the room. It encourages everybody to participate actively and become part of that solution. Everybody has a voice and shares their thoughts, reflections, ideas and feelings, to move the collective forward and become the solution to a specific problem or intervention through building LEGO® models. The models and their metaphorical meanings are owned by their creators; that is to say that there is no hidden truth or pre-set meaning in the bricks. What they stand for is entirely the choice of the builder. Furthermore, the creativity in expression has nothing to do with the representation of an idea from an artistic standpoint. It is not about building something attractive (although many models are) nor is the main aim to create something that is aesthetically pleasing. It is about the expression of something that the builder wants to say. There is no right or wrong way of doing it. Each participant is unique and expresses themselves in unique ways.

The workshop process is based on a series of challenges set as questions, a visual response to these and the sharing of stories. Limited time, usually between 1 and 8 minutes, depending on the build, is made available to construct models as a response to individual questions. More complex applications require slightly longer, however the focus is not on a lengthy, pre-prepared build. Immediacy in responding to the task is key to acting on the impulses, intuitions and ideas that first present themselves, rather than over-analysing or editing what is built. Workshops can last from a one hour introductory session to one or two full days. How long will depend on what you want to achieve and the timeframe and resource with which you can operate. Another way of using the method is to include a shorter activity as a complement to other approaches.

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® training materials set out a four-stage process, which is:

1. Posing the question
2. Building the model
3. Sharing the model
4. Shared reflection

This is mirrored by [LEGO Education](#) in the following four stages: Connect, Construct, Contemplate, Continue. In effect these four Cs are in play with each build; connecting to the question or topic, building in response to it, reflecting on and discussing it with participants and then extending or building further in accordance with more questions or additional thoughts.

As with all good stories the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process has a beginning, a middle and an end.

The beginning: As mentioned above, working practices need to be agreed and the process and desired outcomes explained at the start so that everybody is clear. Then building begins. A progressive approach works best, starting with a warm-up or skills development section. This helps individuals develop their LEGO building skills and move them slowly from building instruction-led literal models to adding metaphorical features to them. At the same time, facilitators start the process of sharing and opening-up in a non-threatening way while also starting the reflective process. The making of their models increases participants' ownership of that which they represent. As time goes on in a workshop, many quickly find it hard to dismantle their creations as they start to identify closely with them, sometimes as an extension of self.

The middle: The main LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process is the following:

1. Posing the question: the facilitator asks a question which is addressed to the whole group. This acts as a trigger and helps participants to focus in on a thought, an idea or a situation. The question needs to be clear and open-ended so that participants understand what they are asked to do and enable freedom to reflect and respond to the question in a way that is meaningful to them and encourages further exploration. Socratic questioning techniques provide this opportunity. They are based on "The Socratic Method" (Nelson, 1949, vi) that creates the space for open dialogue, debate, reflection, ideas generation and individual and collective problem finding and problem solving (Savin-Baden, 2008). These questions help us explore and analyse complex and/or challenging ideas and concepts, as well as uncover some of our assumptions. Questions may start with "what" and "how" and are open questions that seek clarification, reason, identify implications, viewpoints and assumptions. "Why" questions tend to be avoided as these can sound judgemental, and the facilitator does not judge.
2. Building the model: Each participant makes a model individually as a response to the facilitator's question. The model and their meanings belong to the makers, and it is not for others to tell the builder what they meant or thought. Building starts while everything is still messy in participants' minds as they rummage through the bricks and thoughts start to arise. It is advised that participants avoid "having a meeting with themselves" in the building stage. This will help them not to get bogged down in thinking and planning before

they build. This is the opposite of the ways architects, planners and engineers work, in terms of building models and scoping out meticulous plans before any building begins. The immediacy and intuitiveness of the building process are important aspects. The models will emerge and become a visualisation of thoughts that have a specific metaphorical meaning for the makers. The addition of small bricks as markers – say, red or green - are often used after the models have been constructed to highlight a particular strength, challenge, priority or difficulty. This reflecting and selecting action can really help the model maker focus on a key feature and illuminate this as something that is of special significance and therefore of value for further reflection, sharing and exploration. This is triggered through an additional question by the facilitator. Sometimes the facilitator may ask for participants to build smaller “mini models” and a few of them at the same time. This may be to provide specific examples of something, or to flesh out ideas. In addition there are specific LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities that lead to the development of shared models after the initial individual model-building phase. These can help capture the collective response in an inclusive way as all perspectives will be represented. Furthermore, through using connections, we can create landscape models that depict stronger and weaker connections among individual models that help us visualise the interrelationships among individual models and their position in the ecosystem.

3. Sharing the model: This is a very important part of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process. The model acts as a hook to reflect and share our story with others and connect with the stories shared by others. It is important to give enough time to listen to all stories and to allow them to be heard.
4. Reflecting on the model. The process of reflection kicks in as soon as building begins, continues through the building process and when the stories are shared. The facilitator and participants might ask open-ended questions to seek clarification linked to specific models or features and aid deeper reflection.

The process is repeated through a series of scaffold activities introduced through further questions which the facilitator has prepared until the desired outcomes have been met. It is recommended that the facilitator is flexible and responsive.

The end: The facilitator invites participants to reflect individually and collectively to summarise and remember the key themes and ideas. These are captured in the model itself but may also be jotted down in a notebook or learning journal. In some cases a video might be made to capture a group story or the details contained within a model that might be forgotten, but which will be important for taking ideas forward in a more traditional context, outside the workshop.

### ***1.3 The importance of the skilled facilitator***

As with any form of group activity, the facilitator plays a vital role in the use of the process itself and the outcomes. They lay the foundations for the effective implementation of the method, including the creation of a supportive and safe environment that ensures pan-participation. The facilitator is tasked with carefully monitoring what happens during a workshop, to sense challenges or tensions and respond quickly and smoothly to maximise engagement and output. Facilitators do

not participate in the building process; they assume a position outside the participants. Effective facilitators bring the best out of the participants and empower them to share their thoughts and ideas and become part of the solution, part of learning and learning itself.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is highly active and includes every participant. However every participant has to be prepared to be present, engaged and make the commitment to being open to what the method may bring. Using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® techniques means opening up, being honest with self and others, having a voice, discussing and listening respectfully. This openness means being prepared to reflect critically, think, re-think and un-think – perhaps revising long held views or established positions. Such an openness can lead to personal and collective learning, development and growth. However, it can also be seen as a highly sensitive process that participants might fear will expose them or make them feel vulnerable. It often leads them to explore their values, thoughts and ideas as well as their feelings. Not everyone in the workshop will want to do this. In our experience participants can feel a little wary at the outset or downright resistant to the notion of building with a children's toy. It is therefore vital that the facilitator is alert to the feelings and dispositions in the room. Sometimes this might involve enabling participants to settle quickly through activities, or start to understand some of the learning philosophy at work and tackle their chosen topic. As they do so most people start to appreciate how building metaphorical representations of issues important to them can be a creative and valuable act. Participants may also need to feel that they are in a safe environment where sharing is enabled through mutual respect and acceptance of differences and individuality. Whatever the needs of the group, the facilitator's skills are essential. This might involve negotiating and agreeing working practices and goals for the workshop. It might also be about clarifying that no one will be coerced to build or express anything that they do not wish to share or which will make them feel discomfited. Allowing for this however, is not about shying away from the exploration of complex issues important to the group, about which its members may feel strongly. Building models which are the focus for the discussion, rather than the person, means that perspectives can be gathered around all kinds of issues but at one 'remove'. The conversation is about ideas expressed in the model, not about the person.

### **1.3 The power of storytelling through metaphorical symbols**

From Tralee to Timbuktu, storytelling is an instinctive and shared human practice. It is natural for people to share experiences via stories, making them more memorable. This happens through the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process too; individuals quickly move from describing their models in a mechanistic way and turn to storytelling as this is the way we communicate and engage the attention of our audience. Moon (2010) notes that stories are powerful for the storyteller and the listeners and are important vehicles for reflection, sharing of messages, creating opportunities for conversation and learning as well as enabling us to connect emotionally with the stories and their creators.

The models enable us to reflect through the use of personal metaphors, sometimes using familiar entities in new contexts. For example, models that include ladders,

doors, walls and windows are often used to illustrate specific milestones in somebody's learning journey. These help us knit together and share our metaphors with others by telling a story. The metaphors play a vital role in constructing meaning in a more creative way (Schön, 1983). They also enable us to gain a deeper insight into our own thinking and as such they are a valuable tool for reflection. According to Geary (2011, 211) "metaphorical language can describe the indescribable." We find it easier to express complex ideas and emotions for example using metaphors as 3D representations beyond words, but also challenge our own beliefs and make new discoveries. The metaphors, as the models we create, belong to the maker. Both, the models and the metaphors they represent, transfer internal meaning to an external object which might make it easier to talk about messy situations and thought provoking ideas. Teasing out meaning from the model using non-threatening questioning techniques by the facilitators and the group itself is part of the reflective process that helps the individual to make sense of their model and further the group's understanding of a specific situation, topic or experience.

New language leads to new thinking and as such the learner is less likely to reproduce learned or expected responses. Instead their responses are more visceral. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method allows these individual models to be combined or integrated into a new shared model which represents the shared understanding of the group. It is through this process that deep conceptions and misconceptions can be brought to the table and through exposition, conflict and resolution, familiar concepts to storytellers, new knowledge and understanding is co-constructed within that community.

#### **1.4 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and playful learning in higher education**

Interest in playful learning in all its forms has started spreading across higher education. A shift towards active and participatory pedagogies as well as game-based learning and social media technologies as well as open practices are helping to spread the bug for playful learning, teaching and research, together with the growing evidence-base of its value and impact in these settings (Nerantzi & James, 2015a; Nerantzi & James, 2015b; James & Nerantzi, 2018; Whitton, 2018).

There is a pedagogic premise to the method which fits with tertiary learning and with both independent and collaborative enquiry. The process starts with an individual building activity which then leads on to a group activity. Individual models are then shared with others, discussed and perhaps added to or configured and grouped with those of fellow participants. Gauntlett (2011, 4) states that making a model helps individuals to focus and identify creative connections beyond the obvious and notes that "thinking and making are aspects of the same process". Papert developed the "learning through making" or constructionist theory which claims that knowledge is constructed through mental or real models (Papert & Harel, 1991). Frick *et al.* (2013, 8) note that constructionism is "about making formal and abstract ideas more concrete and tangible, therefore easier to understand." Learning is not a process which occurs in isolation. The constructivist view is that learning is achieved through experiences and the integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge. The co-constructivist view extends this to allow that learning is achieved through the sharing of meanings, conceptions and understandings, within learning communities. In this domain, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has a great deal to contribute.

Brown (2010, 101) states that “play is like fertilizer for brain growth. It’s crazy not to use it.” While this is widely recognised especially for children, play is still often dismissed as a valuable learning and development strategy for adults. This is something that we, and numerous colleagues, explore in *The Power of Play in HE: Creativity in Tertiary Learning* (2019). A characteristic of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is learning through play and the personal and collective expression through visualisation of LEGO models via thinking with our own hands. These models represent external images in 3D of our internal reality, thoughts and ideas (James, 2013).

When the potential benefits and personal and collective gains of the process are made clear to adults (who tend to be goal-orientated, according to Brown, 2010), they start to take greater risks and experiment with new approaches which may have been alien to them initially. Some might experience what Csikszentmihalyi (1996) calls ‘being in flow’, an ideal state of intrinsic motivation, which can transform LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® sessions into immersive, enjoyable and highly effective learning and development experiences. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is a playful method that has the power to help participants feel more relaxed, although some may be wary or resistant to start with. Positivity towards LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® can be achieved via the creation of a safe environment that will enable participants to loosen up, immerse themselves in the process, take risks and engage in less common and more playful activities.

## **PART 2: Stories**

In this part diverse educators provide short accounts of their own use of LEGO® or the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method. The examples included are short descriptions of practice from a range of disciplines and professional areas within higher education, and/or testimonials to the benefit of the approach. They do not contain exact recipes to follow in terms of imitating what has been done. Rather, the aim of these is to provide food for thought to others who are considering using LEGO® related activities in their practice. You will also find a mixture here of stories which describe LEGO-based activities which don't have all the distinct characteristics of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and those which do.

### **2.1 Using LEGO with National Health Service Staff**

*contributed by Dr Stephen Powell (email: [s.powell@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:s.powell@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Educational Developer working in the University Teaching Academy, UTA (until March 2019 known as the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching) at Manchester Metropolitan University*

As part of my induction on joining my current employer, I shadowed various colleagues and one of the activities I chose to participate in was a course for academics who wished to explore using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in teaching. From this, I progressed to using LEGO® in some of my own teaching, motivated by a desire to experiment and explore teaching approaches that were new to me.

One example of my use of LEGO® is with a group of 20 National Health Service staff who have a training role for University students in addition to their core responsibilities as scientists and clinical staff. This was a very mixed group from different hospitals and representing different specialisms and ways of working. Some participants had patient facing responsibilities with others working in laboratories.

I used an activity inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to enable participants to explore their roles as trainers, and as a means of identifying goals for future workshops. Key questions were:

- What do you do?
- What makes it fun and rewarding?
- What challenges do you face?
- 

The approach I took was typical of many sessions using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. We started with icebreaker activities to get participants familiar with making models out of LEGO® working on tables with 4-5. We then progressed to building models of their situation, constrained to using six bricks, these were shared by each participant in the group with colleagues encouraged to ask questions, but not make leading suggestions. Further rounds asked participants to add coloured blocks to represent their reflections on the key questions above and again these were shared. Finally, rather than build a collective LEGO® model I asked the groups to develop a flipchart so that they could be shared with other groups or a plenary session exploring the participants roles as trainers & teachers.

The session concluded with a discussion about LEGO® techniques as a teaching approach. Participants were able to identify and explain what they saw as the advantages of the approaches used. This included as an icebreaker activity that got participants who did not know each other talking and sharing and as an approach for promoting reflection on their role as trainers that allowed everyone to have a voice. However, they found it hard to envisage how they might use LEGO® in their training roles, possibly this is because time was limited and it can take a while to get to grips with. Another possibility is that given their work context, they feel constrained about what it is they are 'allowed' to do. Reflecting on the session myself, I was satisfied that it had achieved what I had set out to; the ice-breaker activity got the class talking and working together with the follow-up activities getting participants to think a little deeper about their roles.

I will explore LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® further and undertake a Masters level unit to give some structure to my evaluation and reflection of using this approach and also get a better understanding of the theory behind it. I can also see value in using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® techniques for my institutional project activities, for example, when seeking to improve institutional processes and practices where the use of LEGO® could stimulate creative thinking in workshops.

**2.2 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® with overseas visitors and conference delegates**  
*contributed by Neil Withnell (email: [n.withnell@salford.ac.uk](mailto:n.withnell@salford.ac.uk))*  
*Associate Dean Academic Quality Assurance within the School of Health & Society at the University of Salford*

Having heard great things about LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® -from colleagues in my professional network, I was hoping to use this in my role. I was fortunate to gain a place on the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator training in December 2016, which introduced me to this method and helped me to gain confidence in using it in my own practice. I see many benefits of using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and here are two examples of how I have used it in two different settings.

1. **Creative learning and teaching:** In this first example we welcomed overseas visitors to the School and spent some time working with them to explore creative ways of teaching and learning. The visitors were keen to explore creative approaches and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities seemed to me to be the way to demonstrate this.

They were very quick to engage in the activity and could see the benefits of using aspects of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in their practice. Feedback was very positive and it was great to see all the group fully immersed in the activity. Earlier in the day it was noticeable that there were a few members of the group who tended to sit back and were very quiet; the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach brought them all together and encouraged collaboration.

2. **Gamifying TEF using LEGO based activities:** I worked with a colleague to develop a game for the Higher Education Academy Annual Conference. The theme of the Conference was the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and together we designed a TEF Crystal Maze using LEGO® and other resources to enable participants to spend time in various zones for reflection and discussion. The use of LEGO® encouraged



active participation and the gamification was well received, with positive feedback. Comments included – “fantastic, really loved the Maze” “well done”.

The use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in team working is an area that I intend to explore in the future. The use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® brings together individuals with a shared goal and ensures that everyone can contribute. My own view of team meetings has been that there are several colleagues who do not contribute and through LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® I hope to gain more involvement and “buy-in”.

### **2.3 Introducing LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to colleagues in a digital capabilities workshop environment**

*contributed by Sue Watling (email: [s.watling@hull.ac.uk](mailto:s.watling@hull.ac.uk))  
Teaching Enhancement Advisor at the University of Hull*

I attended a workshop using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® offered by Chrissi Nerantzi at Manchester Metropolitan University. This introduced the pedagogic principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® as well as opportunities to build. Following this, I reclaimed the LEGO® from the attic and took the box into work wanting to try it out with colleagues and see what their responses would be. I wanted to experience a different and more creative approach to teaching enhancement and, hopefully take away some ideas.

I facilitate a digital capabilities network, bringing together colleagues with an interest in developing digital confidence. Always looking for activities which offer alternative approaches to CPD as well as learning and teaching enhancement, I took along my LEGO® box. We tried some tasks from the workshop with Chrissi. The activity which stimulated most discussion was building a virtual learning environment. This is something we all have experience of so was an inclusive trigger, something which is useful when introducing something as novel as building with LEGO® in a higher education environment!

After the workshop, one participant sought me out to explain how their initial disdain turned to engagement and felt the break in routine left them refreshed to continue their day. I'm not sure either of us could accurately identify the trigger for change. Maybe it was the constructive element combined with the unexpected but whatever the reason, it reinforced how LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has the potential for 'magic' to happen. It could be a kinaesthetic connection, the novelty or simply the freedom of being given permission to play and having that experience legitimated. I felt 'permission' was a big deal. The facilitator has to create an environment where it's ok to 'play' but participants also have to give themselves permission to engage on different levels to their day-to-day working routines. This is not always easy to begin with because 'play' is something we often forget to do, as well as being associated with childhood and early years schooling.

Since the workshop, we have developed a 'Creative Pedagogies' strand to our work which includes a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching. Following a series of pilot workshops, we are reviewing evaluative feedback from critical friends, alongside lessons learned from a facilitation viewpoint. This will frame Phase Two where the workshops will be reconstructed and

the principles of 3D building presented as a 'constructionist' pedagogic approach to learning and teaching enhancement, with an emphasis on the value of critical questioning (Papert, 1980). I am now co-module lead on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme and will be introducing building with LEGO as a learning design activity. This will provide a unique opportunity to discuss learning and teaching which I am now confident from experience will stimulate relevant and meaningful discussions.

## References

Papert, S. (1980) **Mindstorms**. Basic Books, Inc.

### **2.4 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for developing effective communication skills**

*Contributed by Sue Beckingham (email: [s.bechingham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:s.bechingham@shu.ac.uk))*

*Principal Lecturer in Business Information Systems and Technology, Sheffield Hallam University*

For some years now I have been looking at different ways to help students who are not confident communicators find a voice. Having attended a couple of workshops using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approaches at conferences, I could see the potential of providing students with a new way to reflect and learn from each other. When asked to take on course leadership of a new foundation degree, I took the opportunity to undertake the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® training course, with a view to integrating activities into the curriculum. I was teaching soft skills development and as a tutor had seen students struggle over the years to articulate the skills that they had and those needing further development. To apply for part-time work experience, placement or eventually graduate jobs, most students will have to undertake interviews and need to be able to express themselves confidently. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® felt like a good way to take this forward.

My mini case study focusses on developing the students' communication skills, exploring effective teamwork and other personal skills. The activity provided time and space to observe, listen, and learn from each other. To facilitate the conversations I asked the students to respond to the following questions by building LEGO® models:

- What makes a good team?
- What are the barriers that can disrupt good team work?
- Think of a key strength, skill or attribute that you bring to the team.
- Choose a skill that needs development. Why is this skill important?

The students were also keeping multimedia reflective blogs and encouraged to take photos of their brick models. Previously reflective writing has been met with resistance. The photos provided context and introduced a structure. The students were more engaged and spoke to the images they had taken, considering both their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the questions on skills and action plans for future development. Going forward the students expressed themselves more fully;

reflecting on class contributions, what they might do differently and naturally began to voice the ongoing skills they were developing.

## **2.5 Exploring concepts using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®**

*Contributed by Dr Thanasis Spyriadis (email: [t.spyriadis@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:t.spyriadis@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Senior Lecturer in Tourism Management, Manchester Metropolitan University*

I am the unit leader for two units, one undergraduate and one postgraduate, which focus on strategic management and marketing in the context of tourism, hospitality and events. I have used LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in my teaching on both these units during a particular seminar that focused on exploring and applying the concepts of strategic vision and mission.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has been an excellent tool to help students explore the specific key concepts (i.e. strategic vision and mission) in a lot of depth. Initially, I organised a guest lecture from STA Travel. Then, in the seminar time, students were organised in teams and were introduced to a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® inspired activity. The student teams were asked to use the LEGO® pieces to design a basic structure (e.g. a bride). Then they were invited to present their structure to the rest of the class. Next, the students were asked to read a 1-page summary of the organisational profile (e.g. values) of Start The Adventure (STA) Travel (<http://www.statravel.co.uk/our-story.htm>). Following from this, the student teams were asked to develop a structure that represented STA Travel's strategic vision. Once they did, they were asked to present their structures in class and justify why they designed it this way. The teams asked each other questions investigating the thinking process of each team in more depth. At the end of the seminar, I connected everything together highlighting the main points between the theory we had discussed previously, the guest lecture content, as well as the ideas we shared in the seminar.

The activity has been mentioned several times in the Internal Student Survey and National Student Survey responses in a positive light. Students found the activity creative, interactive, energetic, as well as enjoyable.

## **2.6 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® gives everybody a voice**

*Contributed by Dr Sean McCusker (email: [sean.mccusker@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:sean.mccusker@northumbria.ac.uk))*

*Associate Professor, Social Work, Education & Community Wellbeing, Northumbria University*

I have been using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for about 4 years within Higher Education environments, mainly within Teacher Education contexts, looking at teacher identity, training needs or research practice. I was first introduced to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® through an EU funded project ([www.s-play.eu](http://www.s-play.eu)) which was adapting LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methods for use in SMEs. Through this, I received enough training in facilitation to deliver some short workshops. However, I felt the need for greater knowledge and legitimacy and so went on to take part in the official LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® training with Robert Rasmussen. Following this, I have been using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in workshops more widely, in my

teaching, in my research, in facilitating staff development and as part of the CPD provision of the University.

Given my background in Engineering and research in Mathematics and Science education, I started with a healthy scepticism about such a ‘touchy – feely’ method. However, I was won over very early on when I saw the level of engagement from participants and the way in which hierarchies and organisational barriers were quickly broken. This aspect has always fascinated me. After each workshop, I make the point of asking participants for frank and honest opinions about the process. I consistently hear about how LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® gives voice to those who have previously felt reluctant to express their views in group work, about how the process opened new ways of expression and thinking and about how the dynamics of the groups in LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops are often very different from those in other group activities.

This has led me to try to understand more of the theoretical underpinnings of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to solidify a methodological basis for it. It has opened for me a wider interest in the affordances of play and playfulness, particularly for adults for whom true play can be quite difficult, unless they take it seriously!

## **2.7 A potpourri of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® applications**

*Contributed by Prof. Tobias Seidl (email: [seidl@hdm-stuttgart.de](mailto:seidl@hdm-stuttgart.de))*

*Professor for Key Competencies at Stuttgart Media University, Germany. Vice-Dean Teaching & Learning, Faculty Information and Communication*

I teach undergraduate students from a range of disciplines and conduct organisational development projects at several German universities. I discovered LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® about six years ago, when I carried out research in systemic coaching methods. One of the most important features of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, I find, is its democratic approach: everyone builds, everyone shares and everyone speaks.

I’m using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® regularly in different learning activities: reflecting the quality of team work in student working groups, articulating students’ perspective on “muddy concepts” (like “good teaching” or “the ideal leader”, see picture below) and developing project plans for doctoral thesis. I am also using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for organisational development in the HE-sector: e.g. developing shared goals and visions for groups of academics, evaluating study programmes with different stakeholders and personal development coaching.

My observations and students’ reflection in their learning portfolio indicate that LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is an effective way to help students reflect deeper than they normally do in their classes. LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® also supports participants to find an appropriate language to address emotional aspects of the topic and express these. The fact that the discussions concentrate on the models and not on the participants, helps them to negotiate challenging aspects in a fair and solution-orientated way. Even if there is occasionally some initial resistance against ‘playing’ with LEGO® in a university setting, the overwhelming majority of my students were, by the end of the workshop (at the latest), enthusiastic about this method.

The next step in my LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® practice will be to test if LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is suitable to be used as a qualitative research method for students' research projects and to develop concepts that enable students to plan short LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® sessions by themselves.

## **2.8 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to develop reflection in undergraduate Fashion Art students**

*Contributed by Lesley Raven (email: [l.raven@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:l.raven@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Programme Leader BA (Hons.) Fashion Art Direction, Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University*

I am an early career researcher undertaking a Doctorate in Education and investigating the pedagogies of reflective practice within HE art and design. From undertaking this doctoral research I am interested in alternative methods of reflection, other than a written format, in order to facilitate more meaningful responses that resonate with the student and hopefully lead to threshold concept moments (Meyer & Land, 2003).

I use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® with first year undergraduate students to promote initial understanding of reflective practice. Students are first asked to simply create a model that represented them; they subsequently discuss these constructions as a group to situate these perceptions. They are next asked to consider amending the model to fit with their current perception of themselves since starting the course (hence facilitating reflection for before and after starting university).

Most recent responses by students to the two set tasks were insightful. For example: two students both described their first constructions as unbalanced/wobbly; both of their amended constructions were more stable and 'anchored' or 'safe', which on additional comparison of the two, suggested to the student that their course of study was 'right' for them and they were feeling grounded on the course. This was insightful; it facilitated the students to reflect meaningfully, which I did not think would have occurred without use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® inspired activities. I continue to facilitate reflection using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® with the L4 as well as introduce this to L5 and L6 students.

### **Reference**

Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (2003). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (1): linkages to ways of thinking and practising, in Rust, C. (ed.) *Improving Student Learning – ten years on*. Oxford: OCSLD

## **2.9 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for Academic Support**

*contributed by Graham Barton (email: [g.p.barton@arts.ac.uk](mailto:g.p.barton@arts.ac.uk))*

*Academic Support Coordinator, University of the Arts London*

Our use of LEGO in our Academic Support offer builds on the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method. We use certain processes from this method to help students work through creative blocks, unpack values, ethics and beliefs that might be driving (or



hindering) the development of work, and to visualise complex ideas. Workshops are offered on a range of topics, such as: disciplinary and interdisciplinary interpretations of concepts, visualising and sharing ontological and methodological positions, and modelling theses, projects, essays and research design. Overall, we find that through our interpretation and use of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method, we are able to help students to make sense, create meaning and achieve insights into self and others' contexts.

Alongside its reflective or contemplative uses, a LEGO® construction built through the process acts as a mediator for communicating with others, and as a way to 'hold' a collective enquiry about complex issues among groups: creating shared models of complex phenomena is a powerful process for fostering collaborative insight and participation.

Alongside our multi-disciplinary, University-wide, offer that is open to all students, the method also helps us to work with individual cohorts: in 2015, we worked closely with the MA Art and Science students at Central Saint Martins to enable them to visualize how they would each integrate their differing aspirations for their research into their final degree show space – itself an integrated piece. Heather Barnett, the pathway leader, and I settled on a range of generative questions for the group, and it was over to them. The students created a short film that gives an insight into the process – their work says it all!

Watch a clip created that showcases some of the LEGO® work done at the University of the Arts London

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTwWTHqgKTK&feature=youtu.be>

## **2.10 Making human connections through LEGO**

*Contributed by Lisa Higgins (email [l.higgins@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:l.higgins@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Senior Lecturer, School of Healthcare Science, Manchester Metropolitan University*

A LEGO and Moodle session was organised during induction week, September 2017 for 250 BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science Level 4 Students to help, personal tutors connect with their personal tutees and help them set up their email signature and facilitate Moodle understanding.

Students were asked to log on to a specific Moodle unit area and find the LEGO® instructions. In the Instructions, students are initially asked to build a house to ascertain they can all build. Once completed they are asked to build a LEGO® structure in less than 3 minutes from the bricks provided to demonstrate their “Journey to university”. This could include education, personal goals attained or anything that has been part of your journey to get to university. They are advised it is not what it looks like that matters but what it represents to them.

The students are asked to email a picture of the LEGO® structure and a short message about themselves and their structure. This information will facilitate an initial conversation in their personal tutor meeting.

The feedback from staff and students were positive as staff felt that this approach helped encourage a dialogue with the student and highlighted possible support they

might find useful during the studies at university. Students said it also helped connect with their personal tutor in a fun situation and helped set up a professional email signature and access Moodle. We have decided to implement this in the future induction due to its success.

### **2.11 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® defuses boredom**

*contributed by Haleh Moravej (email [h.moravej@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:h.moravej@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Senior Lecturer in Nutritional Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University*

I have been using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and variations of it since 2014 as a positive, creative and fun student-led form of module feedback with first year Nutritional Sciences students. Since 2015 I have used LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for my first year module induction sessions too as I would like to compare the final feedback with initial student expectation at the start of the year for first year students. I have found the fun, practical, exciting, colourful and creative way of using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to fit my style of teaching and the module I teach.

I was encouraged by my teaching and learning mentor Dr Chrissi Nerantzi to start looking at alternative methods of capturing student feedback where we focus on students' journey throughout a module and we look at positive feedback as well as areas for development in a constructive way that help both lecturers and the students to take responsibility for learning.

When I use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for induction as my first practical session, the students are a little confused but as soon, theories are explained, students start using their LEGO bricks to build and to construct their individual and unique models. I have used LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® inspired activities for students to get to know each other. I also get a chance to gain insights and better understand my students' expectations and style of working and learning. Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® at the start and at the end of a module helps me estimate and understand growth in student confidence. To start using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® I have to admit that I was a little concerned. Would the students think I was actually doing it as a serious session? Would the students feel patronised that instead of serious academic work I was asking them to play?

The truth is that LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® transformed the way I conducted induction and how I capture end of the module feedback. An uninspiring act of ticking boxes and writing some comments was suddenly turned into a creative and meaningful experience. The playfulness of using LEGO – and perhaps its associations for many with childhood – produced a relaxed atmosphere where students were lying on the floor and really enjoying themselves.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® defused the boredom that often accompanies these kinds of more administrative activities, especially for students who are still settling into university right at the start and once they finish their first year. Students started playing, creating and talking and actually having fun, opened up and shared their honest thoughts about the module, which is exactly what I was looking for.

The use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® inspired activities for module feedback has led to a research activity with my mentor and one of my students. This has been disseminated through conferences and also led to a publication (Nerantzi, Moravej & Johnson, 2015)

## References

Nerantzi, C., Moravej, H. & Johnson, F. (2015) *Play brings openness or using a creative approach to evaluate an undergraduate unit and move forward together*, JPAAP, Vol 3, No. 2, pp. 82-91, available at <http://jpaap.napier.ac.uk/index.php/JPAAP/article/view/141>

### 2.12 LEGO as re-immersion

contributed by Prof. Rebecca Lawthom (email [r.lawthom@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:r.lawthom@mmu.ac.uk))  
Professor of Community Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University

LEGO® is for many of us a return to some aspects of childhood and memory work. Interested in the psychological aspects of LEGO practice, I carved out time to undertake the LEGO® workshop series, provided by Chrissi Nerantzi. She led us through LEGO® usage as serious play, pushing me to think about how to use LEGO in learning and teaching.

My teaching is around Community Psychology and I decided to use it in a final year (level 6) module for BSc Psychology. The Module is entitled Child, Community and Society, interrogating ways in which childhood, as a concept is embedded in constructions and activities that lie outside the child. For example, norms around age of marriage, educational provision differ across communities and society. Using psychology and using the self, students are encouraged to reflect on their own childhoods. Using literature from developmental psychology and Global data on children, allows students to consider their own positionality.

Being a third-year option, the course is popular with students wanting to go on to teach, or become educational psychologists. In the LEGO® session, we used the idea of children's development being nested in systems: familial, geographical and religious community, school; society (policy). This exercise was structured around LEGO® where students build their own interpretation of a nested system reflecting their own context. The activity was fantastically well received with students creatively exploring how they saw and understood their own development. Not only did the LEGO® provoke memories of creativity and childhood but enabled deeper exploration of the issues. Each student presented their model and the class contributed feedback, comparing gaps in literature, contrasting experiences and developing future research ideas.

In the student feedback, lots of positive remarks on this session as being the stand out session of the course. Using LEGO® resulted in positive learning and engagement.



### **2.13 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® with Nursing students**

*contributed by Dr Catherine Hayes (email: [catherine.hayes@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.hayes@sunderland.ac.uk))  
Reader in Pedagogic Practice, University of Sunderland*

As a Reader in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing at the University of Sunderland I have been able to embed gamification as an integral part of the academic curriculum, where teaching reflection and processes of critical reflexivity are fundamental parts of my role. Developing the capacity of students to articulate their meaning making of experiential learning from situated learning contexts in practice based research is a large part of this with Professional Doctorate students.

I have integrated gamification into my teaching sessions over the last twenty years, as a means of engaging postgraduate students as active learners in sessions that were designed to facilitate their learning around concepts that were often challenging.

I have used this method with nursing students, facilitating Professional Practice learning, in relation to 'Professional Identity'.

It afforded me the opportunity to introduce the concept of social constructionism to the students as a means of explaining not just *what* I was hoping they might learn from the teaching session in terms of content, but also *how*.

Qualitative pedagogic research and formal evaluation revealed that LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® had enhanced the capacity of students to articulate the meaning they made in building professional identity and articulating concepts such as their aspirations and contributions to practice.

Building resilience with LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is my next personal venture with this method. Resilience is a core attribution of a healthcare workforce that can be used as an integral part of emotional resilience in the workplace.

### **2.14 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in myriad contexts**

*contributed by Prof. Alison James (email [alison.james@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:alison.james@winchester.ac.uk))  
Professor of Learning and Teaching and Director of Academic Quality and Development, University of Winchester*

When I started working with LEGO® in HE it was 2009 and I was at the London College of Fashion. Most particularly I was trying to come up with a three-dimensional representation of communities of practice theory, using LEGO. Seeing my model a colleague recommended I look into LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. I was instantly intrigued. Long story short, I worked alongside a trained facilitator for 18 months, as we delivered a range of workshops following the method closely. These adopted the applications for team identity following a root and branch restructuring which had impacted heavily on staff. They were remarkably effective in helping

people resolve and move past the traumas of change. Inspired, I then trained with Per Kristiansen and developed workshops for students to explore personal and professional development through LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® techniques (James and Brookfield, 2014, James 2015, James 2016.) Since that time my use of the method has been significant in any situation where exploration of a complex topic is required. This might be for big questions; what is sustainability? how do we motivate learning? what does doctoral research look like? Or for roles; what makes a good Erasmus partner? How can we maximise potential in our team? Or for aspects of curriculum and academic practice; evaluating staff/student industry partnerships or for designing courses. To use a cliché, the list is endless.

Through many years of working with alternative ways of reflecting on experience/learning I have come to understand that the use of different media generates different messages. As we have already seen, the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach is founded on a constructionist basis – that we learn best when we build things. Over time I have learned that what we talk about when we build, as opposed to when we draw, speak, walk and talk, or write, are often quite distinct in tone and content. This is part of the value of the method – that it rounds out consideration of a topic from multiple angles.

Just recently a helper at a LEGO-based workshop for schoolchildren observed to me that things like LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® were ok for kids, but had no place in a university. Not only that, but that there was no evidence that the method had any benefit. The strength of their conviction – even before they had experienced it at all - got me thinking. How do I know LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® techniques make a difference? First and foremost, by the positive ways people respond to the activities and by the conversations they have, during and after workshops. In sessions this is seen in energy, emotion, interest, interaction. Afterwards, participation often perpetuates through continued conversations, changes in practice, ideas for more LEGO-based or different activities. Demand is another obvious indicator; in the numbers of students who have taken part in workshops using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methods (1200 on one of my modules alone, by the time I left LCF); from staff inviting me to help design classes, interventions, projects; by the numbers of colleagues who have asked me how they too can use LEGO® or train as facilitators; by the numbers of invitations I get to run workshops or speak at conferences and from the feedback I get from all of these. The growth in number of accredited facilitators and the increasing use of the method, as evidenced by the way it has inspired stories in this book, are a clear sign that it has tremendous value.

### **2.15 Professional discussions: Using LEGO in assessment in Educational Development**

*contributed by Dr Chrissi Nerantzi (email [c.nerantzi@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.nerantzi@mmu.ac.uk))*

*Principal lecturer academic CPD, University Teaching Academy, UTA (until March 2019 known as the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching), Manchester Metropolitan University*

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® inspired activities were used with students, who are members of teaching staff teaching at university, studying towards the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice at the University of Salford in the context of their

summative assessment for the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education module which is a Professional Discussion with the module tutor and an external panel member. Students were invited to create individual LEGO® models through which they shared their learning from the module.

Students were given 30 minutes in advance of the Professional Discussion to create their models. At the start of the assessment, students talked about their model with the panel members and were asked a few questions to clarify specific aspects when needed. It was noted that the models provided a useful hook for reflection and a focus for the student. It also made them feel more relaxed about the assessment process and broke the ice at the beginning of the discussion and helped the student to open up. As a result, the conversation was richer, more reflective and enabled the panel to gain a deeper insight into student's learning. Models were all photographed and added to students' digital portfolios. This provided an opportunity for reflection and self-assessment (Nerantzi & Despard, 2014).

Overall, the LEGO® approach was received positively by students and panel members. There were some reservations expressed by a very small minority of students who felt less able to fully engage with the process because of its novelty. The assessment outcomes, reflective accounts and discussions with students and panel members confirm the value and positive impact of this LEGO® intervention.

## **References**

Nerantzi, C. & Despard, C. (2014). LEGO models to aid reflection. Enhancing the summative assessment experience in the context of Professional Discussions within accredited Academic Development provision, in: *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, Edinburgh Napier University*, Vol 2, Number 2, July 2014, pp. 31-36, available at <http://jpaap.napier.ac.uk/index.php/JPAAP/article/view/81>

### PART 3: Activity prompts

This part consists of suggestions for a wide range of activities inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® that can be used and adapted for different HE settings. We call them prompts because they do not give you a complete set of instructions to create a LEGO-based workshop, but rather some questions and builds you might integrate into something of your own design. The aim of these prompts, together with the materials already referenced, processes outlined and stories told is help individuals, practitioners, researchers and learners start designing LEGO-based activities for their own contexts and needs.

The activity prompts are organised into the following sections:

- warm-ups
- learning and teaching
- recognition of teaching (HEA)
- educational development (Fellowship of SEDA)
- using learning technologies (Certified Membership of ALT)
- academic coaching and mentoring
- research

Here is a brief reminder of the stages of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Process described earlier:

1. Step 1: Posing the question
2. Step 2: Building the model
3. Step 3: Sharing the model
4. Step 4: Shared reflection

It is recommended that in designing workshops following the method closely that all four stages are included. In this part of the booklet however you will mostly find prompts that focus on step 2, with some suggestion of topics or questions thrown in. Therefore, they are only part of the above described process and you will need to create the additional surrounding structure yourself. As with any learning activity, thinking about why you are using LEGO. What is your main purpose? What kinds of instructions do you want to provide (or not)? Who are using this activity with? What kind of preparation or facilitation do you need to be mindful of?

An illustration of what a 4 step activity might look like is included in this box:

Topic: Identity

Step 1: Posing the question: Who are you as a professional? (*You can flesh this out in any way you like*)

Step 2: Building the model: Make a model that shows who you are as a professional. (*Remind builders that they will be speaking through their model, therefore it needs to be able to represent all the different things they might want to say*)

Step 3: Sharing the model: Allow all members of the group/ a partner to talk the others through their model.

Step 4: Shared reflection: Ask for clarification/further information by asking questions about the model and/or different parts of it. *(Encourage those listening to show they have paid attention through asking questions or commenting, but not interpreting)*

Use the above described format when designing your activities using the prompts included in this part of the booklet.

### **3.1 LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® warm-up prompts**

It is important to remember to start with a brief warm-up activity, especially if it is the first time LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® or an activity inspired by it is being used with a specific group. This will help participants practise putting LEGO bricks together and become more confident in the technical side of using the bricks, as well as transition from building something that exists in the physical world to constructing models that have a metaphorical meaning.

The warm-up activities are normally done individually within a group and focus on building while also introducing the sharing of the models created. The various publications and training materials on LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, as well as our own, make explicit how participants should be working. On their own? In a group? They also give guidance on how to help participants become comfortable with developing their own metaphorical language. Some will dive straight in and be instantly articulate, others might struggle to move away from the literal. In such cases using animals or recognisable bricks and working as a group to generate associations and possibilities.

With participants who are familiar with the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach you might also like to engage them in coming up with their own warm-up activities; a deviation from the method but one that fits with a student-centred and co-design approach to workshop facilitation.

#### **Sample warm-up prompts**

Set 1 (for new group)

Make a tower.

Make an animal (using six bricks).

Add something to this animal that shows that this is your animal i.e. personal to you.

Set 2 (for new and more experienced groups)

Make a wall.

Make a bridge.

Add something to this wall that says something about you.

Set 3 (for a more experienced group)

Make a vehicle.

Add something that shows that this is your vehicle.

Set 4 (for a more experienced group)

Make a plant.

Add something that shows that this is your plant.

### **3.2 Activity prompts for learning and teaching**

This section offers prompts for creating activities inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® principles and applications. These can be used in specific learning and teaching contexts across a wide range of programmes and modules, disciplines and professional areas. Some may be about how you feel about progress or how you have worked together; others, like unpacking big topics, may be something you want to explore as you and your students embark on a new and complex exploration. This might be about a threshold concept in your discipline – semiotics in English Language, ergonomics in Engineering, the principles of human-centred design, the application of the UN Sustainable Goals and their implications for study, society, life. And so on. They will all be a means of enabling everyone in the room to contribute from their perspective, to find common ground and areas of dissonance and surprise. All of this helps round out participants' experience and understanding.

The prompts are gathered into the following areas

- Identity, relationships, belonging
- Reflection and evaluation
- Team building
- Ideas generation for projects
- Understanding a process, a theory
- Unpacking big topics

At this point we are expecting that the guidance we have offered earlier and through wider publications/experiences will be sufficient for you to think about how you might use such prompts in your own contexts. They are partial activities – not a whole lesson plan, however – so you will need to situate them in your own contexts, and expand on them as you see fit. The kinds of questions that you will want to pose to explore these prompts will be for you as facilitator to identify and use, while the builds which will result and what your participants might want to say are impossible entirely to predict – even if some themes or metaphors are recurrent ones. If you are already experienced in using LEGO®-related approaches or the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method you will no doubt be able to dive in. You probably have a whole heap of your own ideas to suggest!

So, as you scroll through the different prompts which follow, don't forget to think about

- How you have prepared for the session – room set up, timings, purpose of the activity, the nature of your group – all the good stuff you naturally take care of as a teacher
- The skills you will need to employ as a facilitator; for example, the kinds of questions you will pose that will enable everyone to participate quickly and be invested in the tasks; whether or not anyone might be reluctant or resistant to getting involved; how you might encourage people to unpack their thoughts, without being too pushy or invasive. How do you want people to work together?

Let's take the first two questions in the Identity prompt set in the following list as examples. How might you integrate asking such questions and building into response to them into a workshop or class, or even a one to one session, such as a

tutorial or coaching meeting. (Each of these has their own specific needs, so obviously you will tailor their use accordingly)

You might use questions of identity with students coming into HE, who are feeling nervous about their place at a university. What is your purpose in asking them to create a model of who they are as a learner? To settle them down and create spaces for conversation? To enable them to identify and visualise their strengths and what they bring to the table? What their expectations and goals might be?

Or in a coaching situation you might invite your coachee (more on coaching anon!) to consider who they are, and where they are currently as a professional. If you are engaged in a coaching relationship with someone they have presumably come to you with a desire to reframe or find their direction, deal with an issue, become 'unstuck' professionally in some way. First of all they often need to explore where they are right now, and by building and visualising who they are, and the context in which they work, and the opportunities/challenges on their horizons they start to realise that what they thought they wanted to tackle and what they actually need to tackle might be very different things.

### **Identity, relationships, belonging**

<i>Sample questions</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Make a model that shows who you are as a learner/professional.</li><li>2. Make a model that shows who you would like to become as a learner/professional and how you could get there.</li></ol>

#### *Other suggestions*

Make a model that shows your key strengths and how you use these.  
Add a red brick to your model that represents the strength you use the least. Why is this?  
What could you do about it?

Make a model to show what your expectations are from your course/this term/this module.

Use a green brick to mark on your model what matters most for you.

Make a shared model that captures the collective expectations of your group.

(for a group who know each other already, at least a little bit)

Make a model of the individual named on the post-it note capturing how you see them.

Share your model without saying who the model represents.

Find out who is who.

Make a model that shows who you are and how this links to the model created by your peer about you.

### **Reflection and evaluation**

(share at least with one person)

Make a model to reflect on your recent placement/group work/learning experience.

Make three mini models that illustrate what you have learnt.



Make a model that shows the challenges you faced in your last assessment/module. Add a red brick to highlight your biggest challenge. What are you going to do about it?

Make a model for one of your peers that would help them resolve their biggest challenge.

Make a model to reflect on the recent field trip/life exhibition.  
Create a shared model that shows your collective experience.  
What are you taking away from this?

In pairs, each make a model to reflect on your group member's contribution to the project.

Make a mini model that shows how you feel what your peer has shared about you. (Share your model with the make of the original model).

### **Team building**

Make an individual model that shows what working in a group means to you.  
Share your model with the group.

Make a shared model as a group that captures your collective understanding of group working.

Make a model that shows what you bring to the group.  
Add a green brick to illustrate your key strength.  
Make a mini model that shows an area you need to develop.

Make a model that shows your nightmare/ideal group member.  
Create a shared model that brings all the characteristics of this person together.

Make a model that shows what effective group working means to you.  
Make a mini model that shows how you will contribute to this and one that shows what help you would need.

### **Ideas generation for projects**

Read the project brief carefully and create three mini models that capture your project ideas.

Add the key challenge you would experience implementing each of the mini models that capture your ideas.

Revisit your mini models. Share them and decide which idea you are taking forward.

You were given a selection of project ideas. Select the one you would like to explore further and make a model that shows where you would like to take this idea.

Make a process model that shows the steps you would follow to work on your project.

Reflect on your model and review it based on your exchanges.

Make a model that depicts your ideas for a group project.  
Each person adds up to three green bricks to their favourite ideas.  
Which idea are you going to take forward as a group?

Make as many mini models as possible that shows how a specific product/concept/idea could be used in a range of contexts.  
Add up to three green bricks to your favourite ideas.

### **Understanding a process, a theory**

Make a model that captures your understanding on the process/concept/theory X.  
Add a red brick to the section you find challenging.  
Reflect on your model and make any changes as a result of your conversation.

After reading chapter/paper/article make a model that shows your understanding from this.

Use a green brick to show what stood out for you.

Reflect on your model and identify if there is anything you wish to change.

Make a model that shows your understanding of a specific theory.

Make a shared model that shows your collective understanding of this theory.

Individually, add a red brick to what you find most confusing/challenging.

Make a model that shows how a specific theoretical approach can be useful for practice.

Reflect on your model. Is there anything you would like to add/change?

### **Unpacking big topics**

Make a model that represents what *[insert topic of your choice or popular educational buzzword here e.g. sustainability/teaching excellence/learning gain]* means to you.

Describe and share your models in turn within your group. What resonances or differences do you note?

Group your models together in a shared network, thinking about how each one might relate to another.

Review your network; is anything, or anyone missing?

Mark up the areas of the model where you feel practice in your context is already strong (you might also like to amplify this by making additional mini models that make explicit what these strengths are)

Where are the gaps, the weak links? Make further mini models to represent these.

What do you need to do next? [for deeper exploration of such topics you can either draw on the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® applications provided through training manuals and other sources, or design your own activity]

### 3.3 Prompts for recognition of teaching (HEA Fellowship)

The Higher Education Academy, since 2018 part of Advance HE, formally recognises teaching through the UK Professional Standards Framework and also has established a series of awards to celebrate teaching excellence. In this section prompts are shared that can support both of these.

#### Activities supporting professional recognition of teaching

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF) by the Higher Education Academy in collaboration with the sector provides a scaffold to explore the use of LEGO-based activities linked its four Descriptors: D1 (Associate Fellow), D2 (Fellow), D3 (Senior Fellow) and D4 (Principal Fellow).

Activities linked to the Descriptors and the Areas of Activities of the UK PSF have been included that can be further tailored and contextualised to a specific professional development, learning and teaching situation aligned with relevant Core Knowledge and Professional Values (see Table 1).

Table 3.3 The Dimensions of the UK PSF (adapted from HEA, 2011, p.3)

Areas of Activity	Core Knowledge	Professional Values
AA1 Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study	CK1 The subject material	PV1 Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities
AA2 Teach and/or support learning	CK2 Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme	PV2 Promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunities for learners
AA3 Assess and give feedback to learners	CK3 How students learn, both generally and within their subject/disciplinary area	PV3 Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development
AA4 Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance	CK4 The use and value of appropriate learning technologies	PV4 Acknowledge the wider context in which higher education operates for professional practice
AA5 Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practice	CK5 Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching	
	CK6 The implications of quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching	

The UK PSF in this context helps to discuss in more depth specific aspects around learning and teaching with academic staff and students.

The activities are arranged in the following sub-sections:

- Activities for Descriptor D1 (Associate Fellow) and D2 (Fellow)
- Activities for Descriptor D3 (Senior Fellow) and D4 (Principal Fellow)

Each of the activities should be no longer than 3-5 minutes for the main model building tasks. Some of the activities are suitable for professional development with academic staff and others with students. There is also an opportunity to engage academic staff and students together in some of them.

Notes: As we have already made clear, you can explore and devise activities using LEGO on a whole spectrum of detail. You can use the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach, which is systematic, developmental and goes into some breadth and depth over time. Or you can create much shorter activities which still have the metaphorical and visually representative nature of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and other creative approaches (such as [Ketso](#) or other non-proprietary approaches of which there are countless examples. The common territory for our examples is the inclusion of LEGO bricks, but the route you adopt to use them is of your choosing.

If you have hopped straight to this section, rather than reading the previous one, please don't forget our reminders of the 4 stage process you can adopt when designing activities. This is an element of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method, but also highly resonant of reflective models created by [Kolb](#) and others.

### **Activities for Descriptor D1(Associate Fellow) and D2 (Fellow)**

#### **AA1 Planning and organising**

(with academic staff)

Build a model that shows what you do when planning a session.

Add a red brick that highlights what you spent most time on.

Reflect on your model, what could you do differently?

(with students)

Build a model that shows how you plan to organise your study for a specific assessment.

Add a green brick that highlights your strength/Add a red brick that highlights an area you might have difficulty with.

Reflect on your model, what could you do differently?

(with students)

Build a model that shows what a nightmare module/programme would look like for you.

Reflect on your model, what could you do about it? Create three mini models to illustrate your ideas.

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model that shows the features of your ideal module.

Add a green brick to show what on your model is the most important feature for you.

As a group, put together 3/5/10 top features for a module.

## **AA2 Teaching and supporting students**

(with academic staff)

Build a model that shows what the challenges are when you teach/support students.  
Build three mini models that show how you could resolve your biggest challenge.

(with students)

Build a model that shows what you enjoy the most in a session?  
As a group create a shared model that shows what you enjoy collectively.

(with students)

Build a model that shows what you can learn from teaching your peers.  
Reflect on your model. In what other ways would teaching peers be valuable for your studies? What could you do about it? Share with at least one person or the whole group.

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model that show the learning/teaching strategies that work for you.  
Add a green brick to shows what you think the most effective strategy is.  
Reflect on your model, what else could work? Capture on a post-it note.

## **AA3 Supporting assessment and feedback**

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model that shows what you find most challenging in assessment/feedback.  
Swap models with another person and build a model on how you could overcome one of the challenges captured in the model made by the other person.  
Share your solution with the maker of the original model.

(with students)

Build a model that shows the benefits/challenges of evaluating your own work/your peers' work.  
Reflect on your model, what else would you add?

(with students)

Build a model that depicts the ideal feedback on your work.  
Create a shared model that depicts your ideal feedback collectively.  
Build additional models/adjust the ones that you have already built to answer the following questions:  
How far does this differ from the feedback you receive currently?  
What impact has feedback had on your work?  
How can you address any gaps or issues with this?

(with academic staff)

Build a model that shows the assessment strategies you use in a specific module.  
Add a red or green brick depending the effectiveness of each strategy.  
Reflect on your model. What else could you try and what difference could this make potentially?

## **AA4 Learning environments**

(with academic staff)

Make a model that shows how you use/could use technologies to create a stimulating and inclusive learning environment.

What else could you do? Revisit your model and share.

What obstacles do you face in using technology?

What solutions can you devise in your models to overcome these?

(with students)

Make a model that shows how the learning environment impacts on your learning.

Add up to three green bricks to signalise what affects you the most positively.

(with academic staff/students)

Make a model that shows your nightmare learning environment.

Reflect on your model and make up to three mini models that depict your solutions about how this nightmare situation can be avoided.

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model of an inclusive learning environment. What does one look like?

What do you do to create an inclusive learning environment?

Arrange your models after sharing into a group network of models

What is your biggest challenge? Create a mini model that depicts this.

Share your mini model with one person. Reflect on your challenge and problem-solve together.

### **AA5 Professional development**

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model that depicts the professional development activities you undertake to develop your teaching/practice.

Revisit your model and add anything you had forgotten.

How effective have these activities been in developing you? Add features to your model/s

What else could you do? Capture on a post-it note.

(with academic staff/students)

Make a model that shows who you are as a professional (teacher) today.

Make a model that shows how you think others see you.

Make a model who you would like to become?

(with academic staff)

Make a model that shows your scholarly approach to learning and teaching?

Reflect on your model and create a mini model that shows what else you would like to try.

(with academic staff/students)

Build a model that shows how you evaluate your practice.

Use a red brick to show which aspect of it you find most challenging.

What could you stop doing? Remove this part from your model and explain the difference this could make.

### **Activities for Descriptor D3 (Senior Fellow) and D4 (Principal Fellow)**

### **D3.7 Supervision and/or mentoring of colleagues**

Build a model that shows how you support and/or mentor colleagues internally and/or externally.

Identify your biggest success stories and create at least three mini models to reflect on and illustrate these.

Build a model that shows the nature of the evidence you have that your approaches to supervising and/or mentoring colleagues have had an impact on them and their practice.

How do you know that you have had an impact? Adjust your model to reflect this knowledge/evidence

Build a model that shows your supporting and/or mentoring philosophy? Who/what has influenced and shaped your related practice?

Add a green brick to the area on your model that shows what influenced you the most.

### **D4.2 Strategic leadership**

Build a model that shows your strategic leadership qualities.

Mark, using a green brick, the area on your model that shows what you are the most proud of.

Build a model that shows what leadership theories and approaches have influenced you.

Build three mini models that show how these theories or approaches are expressed in your strategic leadership practice.

Build as many mini models as possible that show the key impact your strategic leadership has had on your institution or externally.

Build a model that shows what wider changes your strategic leadership has triggered.

### **Activities supporting teaching excellence**

The HEA has established a range of awards to celebrate and reward outstanding teaching at personal, collective and institutional level. These are the National Teaching Fellowship Award, the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence and the Global Teaching Excellence Award.

The related activities are arranged in the following sub-sections:

- Activities supporting National Teaching Fellowship applications
- Activities supporting Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence applications
- Activities supporting the Global Teaching Excellence Award

### **Activities supporting National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) applications**

The National Teaching Fellowships introduced by the HEA in 2000 give an opportunity to individuals teaching or supporting learning in Higher Education in England, Northern Ireland and Wales to be recognised for their individual teaching excellence. The selection criteria are the following:

- Criterion 1: Individual excellence
- Criterion 2: Raising the profile of excellence
- Criterion 3: Developing excellence

The activities that follow have been aligned to these three criteria presented above. Further information about the National Teaching Fellowship Award can be found at <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/national-teaching-fellowship-scheme/NTF>

The following will enable you to reflect on who you are as an excellent practitioner and construct an introductory paragraph.

### **Introduction to self**

Build a model that shows your key milestones through life and how you have arrived where you are today.

Add a green brick to the area that illustrates what brought you into academia.

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Build a model that illuminates your philosophy of learning and teaching.

What do you feel most passionate about?

Build a model that illustrates how you inspire students and colleagues.

Build another model that shows what this means to you.

### **Criterion 1: Individual excellence: evidence of enhancing and transforming the student learning experience commensurate with the individual's context and the opportunities afforded by it.**

Build a model that shows what makes you an excellent practitioner.

Build three mini models that show your initiative in creating opportunities to transform student learning within and beyond your institution.

Build a model that shows what strategies you have used in transforming the student experience locally and nationally.

Build three models that showcase where you have been instrumental in making change happen locally and nationally.

What is your biggest achievement? Add a green brick to your model to show this.

How do you know you have transformed learning? Adjust your model so that this is clear

### **Criterion 2: Raising the profile of excellence: evidence of supporting colleagues and influencing support for student learning; demonstrating impact and engagement beyond the nominee's immediate academic or professional role.**

Build a model that shows your rationale for helping others become excellent and what this means to you.

Build a model that shows how you have supported/mentored and inspired colleagues to become excellent teachers.

Use a green brick to mark your biggest success story.

Build a mini model that shows how this makes you feel.



Build a model that shows three situations where your support/mentoring role make a significant contribution to a colleague's teaching excellence.

**Criterion 3: Developing excellence: evidence of the nominee's commitment to her/his ongoing professional development with regard to teaching and learning and/or learning support.**

Build a model that demonstrates the importance ongoing professional development has for you as a practitioner.

Build a model that shows key professional development activities you undertake to enhance your teaching practice and/or supporting students.

Build a model to show the impact your professional development has had on your practice and the student experience.

**Activities supporting Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) applications**

The [Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/CATE%202018%20-%20Reviewer%20Guidance.pdf) introduced by the HEA in 2016 give an opportunity to teams teaching or supporting learning in Higher Education in England and Wales to be recognised for their collective teaching excellence. Each institution can submit up to one submission for CATE. An NTF can be a team member but not lead the team. The selection criteria for Stage 1 and Stage 2 follow as noted in HEA (2018)

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/CATE%202018%20-%20Reviewer%20Guidance.pdf>

**Stage 1 Criteria**

- a clear set of aims, objectives and rationale for the team's approach and how the group constitutes a team and developed as a team
- working collaboratively and how collaborative working has been an advantage
- demonstration of direct involvement of students with the team
- illustration of how the team has addressed one clear thematic issue, for example: assessment and feedback; retention, employability, staff development; students as partners; technology and social media
- creative solutions to a challenge, situation, problem provision
- detailed comment on the impact of the outcomes/outputs of the collaborative work
- how the collaborative work has enhanced student learning

**Supporting Stage 1**

**Team approach**

Build a model that shows how you work together as a team.

Add a green brick to your model to show where your collective strength lies.

Build a shared model bringing together your collective strength.

**Student involvement**

Build a model that shows how students have been directly involved in your team working

Build three mini models to show specific examples from practice and the impact these have had.

### **Collaborative working, outputs and impact**

Build three mini models that shows your team approach to collaborative working, outputs and impact (one for each).

Build three shared models that synthesise your thoughts around collaborative working, outputs and impact (one for each) at team level.

### **Collaborative working and impact on student learning**

Build a model that shows the characteristics of your team approach to collaborative working.

Build three mini models to illustrate the impact your collaborative working has had on student learning.

### **Engagement with a specific thematic area**

Build a model that shows how the team has come together and focused on a specific thematic area.

Build a shared model to articulate this thematic area more fully taking into account features from individual team member models.

### **Creative solutions**

Build a model that shows your creative capacity as a team to come up with innovative solutions.

Build a shared model to synthesise your thoughts around this.

### **Stage 2 Criteria**

- a coherent plan of dissemination with objectives
- demonstration of stakeholder engagement in the dissemination process
- demonstration of embedding cutting-edge practice
- clarity with regard to dissemination tools
- manageable timeframe
- details of evaluation and the measurement of impact

### **Supporting Stage 2**

#### **A coherent plan of dissemination with objectives**

Build a model that shows how your team could disseminate their collective work.

Build a shared model that shows the key ideas from the individual models.

#### **Demonstration of stakeholder engagement in the dissemination process**

Build at least three mini models showing how you plan to engage different stakeholders in the dissemination process.

Build corresponding mini models to show what difference these stakeholders can make to the dissemination process.

#### **Demonstration of embedding cutting-edge practice**

Build a model that shows how your team will embed cutting-edge practice.  
Create three mini models that show that this change could mean.  
Come together and create a landscape that brings your individual ideas together  
How do you know that your efforts have been successful?

### **Clarity with regard to dissemination tools**

Build a model that shows the dissemination tools you feel are appropriate for the team.  
Add a green brick to mark the most important one on your model.  
Build a shared model bringing your key ideas together using the green brick areas you have identified on your individual models.  
How do you know the effect they have?

### **Manageable timeframe**

Build a model that shows your plan to disseminate your collective work in relevant contexts.  
Add a red brick to identify the biggest challenge.

### **Details of evaluation and the measurement of impact**

Build a model that shows how you as a team could evaluate your collective work and measure impact.  
Build a landscape to bring all ideas together and show their relationship to each other.  
How do you know that your measurements are valid?

### 3.4 Prompts for educational development (Fellowship of SEDA)

The professional body for educational developers is the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA). The SEDA website can be found at <https://www.seda.ac.uk/>. Specialist courses are offered by SEDA to help educational developers gain deeper insights into the profession and gain Fellowship of SEDA (FSEDA). Through the submission of a portfolio of evidence educational developers can also gain Senior Fellowship of SEDA (SFSEDA). Furthermore, FSEDAs and SFSEDAs, provide annually evidence of CPD.

The activities in this section, aim to help new and more experienced educational developers reflect on their journey as educational developers as part of their formal or informal CPD. The activities aim to engage individuals with the SEDA Professional Development Framework that can be accessed at <https://www.seda.ac.uk/what-is-seda-pdf> and have been summarised in the following table.

Table 3.4 SEDA Professional Development Framework (adapted from SEDA, online)

Values	Development outcomes	Specialist outcomes linked to the Staff and Educational Development Award
Developing understanding how people learn  Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical  Working with and developing learning communities  Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity  Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes	Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities Plan for their initial and / or continuing professional development Undertake appropriate development activities Review their development and their practice, and the relations between them.	Identify goals for staff and educational development processes Plan staff and educational development processes towards achievement of these goals Facilitate processes to achieve the agreed goals Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and the acceptability of the development processes With the client, identify appropriate follow-up development activity.

#### Values

##### Developing understanding of how people learn

Make a model that shows your understanding of how people learn.

Make a model that shows a difficulty you experienced when helping somebody to learn something.

Make a second model that shows what you did to overcome this difficulty.

Reflect on your second model and think, what else you could have done.

Make a model that shows an ideal way of helping others learn and develop.

Make a mini model for somebody else suggesting a way to make it happen.

### **Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical**

Make a model that shows characteristics of your scholarly approach to educational development.

What does scholarship look like to you? In your field?

Use a red brick to show an area you would like to develop further.

Make a model that shows what it means to you to be a professional.

Make three mini models that show how you have applied this professionalism in your practice.

Make a model that shows your ethical commitment as a professional.

Make a shared model that shows you collective commitment to ethical practice.

### **Working with and developing learning communities**

Make a model that shows a learning community you developed recently.

Mark its key characteristics by adding three green bricks to your model.

Make a model that shows how you have worked with or participated in a particular learning community.

Add a green brick to show something that worked really well and a red brick to something that was challenging.

Make a model that shows how you go about developing a learning community.

Make a shared model that brings all ideas together.

### **Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity**

Make a model that shows what inclusivity means to you in your professional context.

What is the most important element? Mark this using a green brick on your model.

Make a model that shows how you value diversity within your professional context.

Make connections between your model and those created by others. What do you notice?

Make three mini models that show key benefits/challenges of inclusive practice.

### **Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes**

Make a model that shows your journey as an educational developer in the last academic year.

Add a red brick to show a key challenge you experienced.

Make a model that shows an example where you have helped somebody to develop their teaching practice in the last academic year.

Add a green brick to show something you are proud of.

Make a model that shows a new process you introduced in the last academic year.

Create three mini models to show what you are going to do next linked to this process.

### **Development outcomes**

#### **Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities**

Make a model that show your professional development goals.

Use a red brick to show what is most important to you.

Make three models that show where you would like to be in one year, three years and five years.

Make three more models that show how you will get there.

Make a model that shows your development needs for the next five years.

Add a red brick to show that the biggest challenge will be.

#### **Plan for their initial and / or continuing professional development**

Make a model to show what you plan to do to develop your practice in the next academic year.

Make a model that shows your plan for initial/continuing professional development. What else could you do? Create a mini model to illustrate.

As a new educational developer, what do you plan to do in the next academic year to develop your practice?

[As an 'old' educational developer, ask yourself this question and build!]

What else could you try? Create a mini model to show.

#### **Undertake appropriate development activities**

Make a model that shows three key development activities you undertook.

Make three mini models that show what difference these activities made to your practice.

Make two models, one that captures something valuable you learnt through a specific development activity and one that captures a particular challenge you faced during this.

Make a model that shows a specific professional development activity you undertook.

Use a red brick to show a specific challenge you faced.

#### **Review their development and their practice, and the relations between them.**

Make a model that shows something you have achieved this year.

Add a red brick to show a particular challenge you faced and how you did overcome this.

Make a model that shows how your development is shaping your practice.

Add a green brick to show something you are proud of.

Make a model that shows your review of a specific aspect of your practice.

Make a mini model to suggest a development intervention for somebody else.

### **Specialist outcomes linked to the Staff and Educational Development Award**

#### **Identify goals for staff and educational development processes**

Make a model that shows a nightmare educational development process.  
Get into pairs and add a red brick to the model of the other person that shows what you would find most challenging.  
Discuss these challenges on both models and identify a way to resolve these.

Make three mini models that capture educational development goals, based on institutional priorities and aspirations.  
Add a green brick to the model that captures the most important goal for you.

Make a model that shows a specific goal for an educational development process.  
Create a shared model that brings all your goals together.

### **Plan staff and educational development processes towards achievement of these goals**

Make a model that shows specific educational development process you plan to implement.  
Using a red brick highlight the biggest challenge you anticipate.  
Create a model for somebody else in the group that depicts how this challenge could be overcome.

Make a model that shows specific educational development process you plan to implement to achieve a specific goal.  
Using a red brick highlight the biggest opportunity you can see.

Make a model that shows what support you need to achieve your goal linked to the process you have developed.  
Identify the three most important support mechanisms. Use three red bricks to identify these on your model.

### **Facilitate processes to achieve the agreed goals**

Make a model that shows your plan to achieve a specific goal.  
Add a red brick to the area on your model that shows the biggest challenge.  
Collectively identify all the challenges you have by constructing a shared model.

Make a model where the process you followed didn't lead to the desired outcome.  
Suggest to another person what you would have done differently based on their story. Create a model that shows the approach you would have taken.

Create a model of your ideal process to achieve a specific goal.  
What do you need to do to make this happen? Create three mini models to demonstrate this.  
Share your mini models with at least one person.

### **Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and the acceptability of the development processes**

Make a model that shows the strategies you use to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a particular development process.  
Add a green brick to indicate something that has worked particularly well.  
Create a shared model of your most successful strategies.

Make a model to show how you have evaluated a specific development process.  
What else could you try? Capture your ideas by making three mini models.

Make a model that shows your ideal monitoring and evaluation process of a development process.

Use up to three green bricks to indicate your preferred ideas on all models.

What are the top 3/5/10 ideas? Capture these in a shared model.

**With the client/colleague, identify appropriate follow-up development activity.**

Make a model that shows how you have worked with a client/colleague to design a particular follow-up development activity.

Use a red brick to show one aspect that was particularly challenging.

Task 1: Make a model that shows a nightmare situation for designing a follow-up development process.

How can you avoid this happening? Make a mini model to articulate your answer.

Make a model that shows an idea situation for designing a follow-up development process.

What else could you try? Make a mini model to articulate your answer.



### 3.5 Prompts for using learning technologies (Certified Membership of ALT)

The professional body for learning technologists is the Association for Learning Technology (ALT). Their website can be found at <https://www.alt.ac.uk/> Through ALT, an individual can gain professional recognition in the area of Learning Technology and become a Certified Member of ALT (CMALT). Furthermore individuals and teams can be recognised and celebrated for their contribution to the field of Learning Technology through a series of ALT Awards. The activities that follow are arranged in the following sections:

- Activities supporting CMALT (re-)submissions
- Activities supporting ALT Learning Technologist of the Year applications
- Activities supporting applications for the annual Award of Research into Learning Technology

#### Activities to support CMALT and periodic (re-)submissions for CPD purposes

In order for someone to become a Certified Member of ALT (CMALT), a digital portfolio is submitted that provides evidence of their related experience and capabilities linked to the principles and values of ALT, as well as the core areas: operational issues, teaching, learning and/or assessment processes, the wider context and communication. Applicants are also invited to provide additional evidence around at least one specialist area and their plans for the future. Further information can be found at

[https://www.alt.ac.uk/sites/alt.ac.uk/files/CMALT%20Guidelines\\_2018\\_NC\\_ND.pdf](https://www.alt.ac.uk/sites/alt.ac.uk/files/CMALT%20Guidelines_2018_NC_ND.pdf)

Also see Table 3.5.

Table 3.5.CMALT requirements (adapted from ALT, online)

Principles and values			
a commitment to exploring and understanding the interplay between technology and learning			
a commitment to keep up-to-date with new technologies			
an empathy with and willingness to learn from colleagues from different backgrounds and specialisms			
a commitment to communicate and disseminate effective practice			
Core area (CA) 1: Operational issues	Core area 2: Teaching, learning and/or assessment processes	Core area 3: The wider context	Core area 4: Communication
CA 1.1 an understanding of the constraints and benefits of different technology	CA 2.1 an understanding of teaching, learning and/or assessment processes	CA 3.1 understanding and engaging with legislation, policies and standards	CA 4.1 working with others
CA 1.2 technical knowledge and	CA 2.2 an understanding of your target learners	CA 3.2 policy	CA 4.2 interface between human and technical systems (not a requirement but part of CA 4)

ability in the use of learning technology			
CA 1.3 supporting the deployment of learning technologies			
Specialist option(s)			
Future plans			

For further information, please access <https://www.alt.ac.uk/certified-membership>. The following LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities are designed to offer help to applicants who are in the process of applying for CMALT or renewing their CMALT status. The activities provide opportunities to reflect on their experiences and capabilities and gather evidence that will help them complete the application as well as identify areas for further development.

### **Core area 1: Operational issues**

#### **CA 1.1 An understanding of the constraints and benefits of different technology**

Build a model that shows the key benefits of using different technology in your practice.

Create a shared model that incorporates all your benefits as a group.

Build a model that shows the constraints of using different technology in your practice.

Create a shared model that incorporates all your constraints as a group.

Build a model that shows one particular constraint of technology in your practice.

Build three mini models that shows how you could overcome this constraint.

#### **CA 1.2 technical knowledge and ability in the use of learning technology**

Build a model that illustrates your technical knowledge in using learning technology.

Add a green brick to show the most important characteristic of your approach.

Reflect on your model and identify if you would like to make any modification(s) as a result of your exchanges.

Build a model that illustrates a specific example of using learning technology effectively.

Reflect again on this experience and identify what you would do differently. Add something to your existing model to show this.

Build a model that illustrates your strengths in using learning technology.

Add a green brick to show your key strength in this area.

What are your collective strengths as a group? Capture these through creating a shared model.

### **CA 1.3 supporting the deployment of learning technologies**

Build a model that illustrates three different ways you support the deployment of technologies.

What else could you try? Create a mini model to illustrate this.

Build a model that illustrates a specific example where you supported the deployment of technology.

Add a green brick to show what worked well and a red brick to show something that didn't work so well.

Build a model that shows one specific case where you supported the deployment of technology successfully.

Build three mini models that show what success looked like.

## **Core area 2: Teaching, learning and/or assessment processes**

### **CA 2.1 an understanding of teaching, learning and/or assessment processes**

Make a model that shows your understanding of the learning process and the role technology can play in this.

Make a mini model that shows how you have used this understanding in a specific context.

Make a model that shows your understanding of what matters most in the teaching process and the role technology can play in this.

Create a shared model that captures your collective understanding in this area.

Make a model that shows your understanding of assessment and feedback processes and the role technology can play to support these.

Make three mini models that shows three examples from your practice where you have used this understanding.

### **CA 2.2 an understanding of your target learners**

Make a model that shows what role learners play in the teaching/assessment/feedback process.

Make a new model that shows a specific situation where you have applied this understanding.

Make a model that shows the relationship you have with your learners.

What is most important to you in this relationship? Mark this with a green brick.

Share your green brick with at least one person.

Make a model that shows three common challenges your learners are confronted with and how you help them overcome these.

What else could you try? Make a mini model to show this.

## **Core area 3: The wider context**

### **CA 3.1 understanding and engaging with legislation, policies and standards**

Make a model that shows your understanding of legislation in relation to the use of learning technologies.

What have you found most challenging? Add a red brick to your model to illustrate this.

Make a model that shows your understanding of (institutional) policies in relation to the use of learning technologies.

What has worked for you? Add a green brick to your model to illustrate this.

Make a model that shows your understanding of the role of standards in relation to the use of learning technologies.

What have you found particularly useful? Add a green brick to your model to illustrate this.

What have you found particularly challenging? Add a red brick to your model to illustrate this.

### **CA 3.2 policy**

Make a model that shows your understanding of the role (institutional/wider) policy plays in the implementation of learning technologies.

Make a model that shows how policy has supported you in the implementation of learning technologies in a specific situation.

Create a shared model that brings your collective experiences together.

Make a model that shows a situation where you have influenced policy for the use of learning technology.

Use a red brick to show what was most challenging in this process.

Reflect on this situation again and create a mini model that shows how you did overcome this challenge.

## **Core area 4: Communication**

### **CA 4.1 working with others**

Make a model that shows how you work with others.

Make a model that shows the benefits you have experienced when working with others.

Make a model to show a specific example where working with others was successful.

Make a model that shows the challenges you have experienced when working with others.

Make a model to show a specific example where and how you have overcome such challenges.

### **C4.2 interface between human and technical systems (not a requirement but part of CA 4)**

Make a model that shows your priorities when designing interventions for human interaction with technical systems.

Add a red brick to show a difficulty you have identified in this area.

What are the three most important aspects when you think about the interface between human and technical systems. Make a model to capture these. Create a shared model that shows your thoughts in this area collectively.

Make a model that shows the relationship between institutional and non-institutional technical systems and the role they play for human interaction. After reflecting on your original model and sharing this, make any changes/additions to this you feel are needed.

### **Specialist option(s)**

Make a model that shows your specialist area(s) using learning technologies. Create three mini models to capture your achievements in this/these specialist area(s).

Make three models that show examples of practice in your specialist area. What else would you like to try? Make a mini model to illustrate this.

Make a model that shows what motivated you to engage with this area. Make an additional model that shows your learning journey in this area.

### **Future plans**

Make a model that captures what you plan to do in the next academic year. Reflect on your plan and create a mini model that shows how you could implement your plan.

Make a model that shows what your plans for the future are. Use a red brick to indicate your biggest challenge. Reflect on your plans and create a mini model that shows what difference it would make to make your plans reality.

Make a model that shows what you would like to have achieved in three years.

### **Activities supporting ALT Learning Technologist of the Year Award application**

This is a special award for anybody using learning technologies innovatively in their learning and teaching and/or supporting students introduced by the Association for Learning Technology in 2007. The ALT Learning Technologist of the Year is awarded to individuals and teams who have evidenced an outstanding contribution to the field of learning technology nationally.

Award applicants, individuals and teams, are asked to provide evidence summarised in the following four areas as presented on the above ALT webpage:

1. A clear description of the actions taken to develop and support the achievement
2. Clear, credible, statement of individual or team approach to the technological, and/or methodological, and/or managerial, and/or teaching and learning choices made by the applicant (individual or team), during the period covered by the application
3. Major and beneficial impact on practices within the applicant's or team's organisation, community, or sphere of influence
4. Outstanding overall contribution in managing, researching, supporting or enabling learning, teaching or assessment with the use of learning technology.

The activities that follow have been aligned to the above criteria. For more information about the award, see <https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/awards>

**Actions undertaken to develop and support the individual/team achievement Activity**

Build a model to show what you did to support the individual/team achievement.  
What has been your biggest success?

**Individual/team approach to the technological, and/or methodological, and/or managerial, and/or teaching and learning choices made**

Build a model that shows your individual/team approach to the **technological, and/or methodological, and/or managerial, and/or teaching and learning choices you made.**

Re-build your model keeping only the most successful elements of your approach.

**Major individual/team impact and influence**

Build a series of mini models that show your personal/team sphere of impact and influence.

Add a green brick to the mini model that shows your greatest impact.

Write the supporting evidence for this on the post-it note.

**Major individual/team contribution in managing, researching, supporting or enabling learning, teaching or assessment using learning technologies**

Build a model that shows your biggest contribution as an individual/team in the area of **researching, supporting or enabling learning, teaching or assessment using learning technologies.**

Make a mini model that shows how you feel about this

**Activities supporting applications for the annual Award of Research into Learning Technology**

This award will be awarded by ALT for the first time in 2018 to celebrate outstanding research achievement and in particular early career researchers in the area of Learning Technology.

*Please note, activities for this section will be added at a later stage when the criteria will be known.*

### **3.6 Prompts for coaching and mentoring**

This section contains suggestions for activities that can be used in individual and/or team coaching and mentoring situations. They can also be used to support the professional development, initial and continuous, of coaches and mentors. While the prompts may be wide-ranging we are concentrating here on their use in terms of academic contexts, including those of the professional educator.

#### *A quick overview of the roles of, and differences between, coaches and mentors*

We are assuming that if you are reading this section you are already quite clear, through your own experience of how the coaching/mentoring relationship plays out. If, however, you are new to the subject and would like this defined, the following summary is for you. We also recommend that if you are thinking of undertaking a coach/mentor role you also engage with suitable training and support, including external literature and your own professional practice.

Coaching is a supportive, dialogic relationship between coach and coachee with the specific aim of moving the coachee forward with a goal of their own defining. It differs from mentoring in a number of distinct ways: a coach does not advise the coachee what to do, set out specific options, or give examples from their own experience and knowledge base to influence the coachee to make a decision. A coach does not judge, nor would they start sentences with leading phrases such as 'if I were you...what I think you should do is...when I was in a similar position I did x...' A coach will have been chosen to be an impartial and neutral thinking partner, who helps the coachee elicit their own options and make their own choices.

A professional or academic mentor is more likely to have been chosen on the basis of their experience, specialist knowledge or career trajectory. They can give the mentor specific information or examples to help them decide what to do in certain situations. In short, a mentor is more directive than a coach. There are also connotations of age and experience within the mentoring role: a mentor might be more senior, or more experienced.

The activities are arranged in the following two sub-sections:

- Section A: LEGO-based activities for coaching and mentoring situations (including at the start of any coaching or mentoring arrangement)
- Section B: LEGO-based activities for the professional development of coaches and mentors

As in the previous sections, our recommendations for what to think about before you start are relevant here as well.

### **Section A: Coaching and mentoring situations**

#### **The coaching contract**

(or coach and coachee who both participate, build and share. This can also be used in team settings)

Build a model that shows your expectations from a coaching relationship.

Build a shared model that shows your expectations collectively.

Tell the story of your shared model.

### **What to work on**

Build a model of your current situation, including your own headspace, aims, frustrations, confusions, as well as your role and context

Using a coaching framework, such as [TGROW](#), create a model or models that help you discuss each of the stages e.g.

T – Topic – what do you want to discuss

G - Goal - what is it you want to achieve? What are you aiming for?

R – Reality – what is your present situation?

O – Options - what are the different courses of action open to you?

W – Wrap-up/Will – what are you actually going to do now? How strong is your determination to do this? What might get in your way., help you?

### **Becoming Unstuck**

Feeling stuck in a situation or way of being/feeling is often what prompts people to find themselves a coach. Often the activity above will have relevance for how to get past the sense of blockage. Or you could try building with the following prompts:

Where at the moment do you feel most stuck?

What impact is this having on you?

What/who around you can help with this?

What do you/will you prioritise?

This activity is a good one for pairs, or if undertaken in a group situation maybe one where the partner or members can help build solutions and suggestions for the coachee.

### **My ideal coach**

Build a model that shows the key characteristics of your ideal coach.

Add a green brick to indicate the most important characteristic.

### **My ideal coachee**

Build a model that shows the key characteristics of your ideal coachee.

Add a green brick to indicate the most important characteristic.

### **Real and ideal self**

(Self-coaching to enhance performance)

Create a mini model that shows who you are today.

Create a second mini model that shows who you want to become.

Create a model that shows your current performance.

Add a red brick to indicate your main challenge and a green brick to show what really works.

Share your model through a note you write to yourself.



After a week, revisit your model and your note. What can you do to optimise your performance? Create a model that shows your options.

### **Brainstorming to generate ideas**

Create as many mini models as possible to generate ideas linked to a specific topic/situation.

As a group, create a shared model using the ideas generated through your individual mini models.

### **Analysing and solving complex issues**

Build a model that shows a complex issue you are facing.

Identify the three most challenging aspects of it and add three red bricks to your model that depict these.

### **Managing set-backs**

Build a model that shows the setbacks you have experienced in a particular situation.

Build three mini models that show how you could manage these.

What will you commit to do? Create a model that shows this.

### **Overcoming conflict**

Build a model that shows specific strategies you use to overcome conflict.

Identify one of your strategies that hasn't worked. Add a red brick to the area on your model which shows this.

What else could you try? Build three mini models.

### **Developing as a leader**

Build a model that shows who you want to become as a leader,

What do you need to do to get there? Build a new model that shows your development needs.

### **Progressing a project**

Build a model that shows where you are with a specific project"

What do you need to do to progress this project? Create three mini models that depict the strategies you could use.

### **Empowering others**

Build as many mini models as possible that depict the approaches you use to empower others.

Select the three that seem to work better. Share these.

What else could you try? Create further mini models.

Share these mini models and select the one you are going to try.

### **Developing personal/professional skills**

Create a model that shows the skills of need to complete a specific task in your job.

What are the areas you need to develop further? Add a red brick to highlight this.

Create a model for somebody else in the group suggesting what they could do to develop in this area.

### **Motivating individuals**

Build a model that shows the strategies you use to motivate others.  
Add a red brick to the strategy that doesn't work well and a green brick to the strategy that works well.  
What else could you try? Build a mini model and share this.

### **Defining goals**

Build a model that shows what you want to achieve in the next 6 months/3/5 years.  
Build a model that shows how you could get there.

### **Using GROW to achieve goals**

Build a mini model that shows what you want to achieve.  
Build another mini model that shows where you are now.  
Build a mini model that shows what you could do?  
What do you commit to do?

### **Career progression**

Build a model that depicts where you are in your career.  
Build another model that shows where you want to go next.  
Discuss what you need to do to get there.

### **My perfect role**

Make a model that shows your perfect role.  
Build a model that shows how you will secure this.

### **My perfect line manager**

Make a model that shows your perfect line manager.  
Build a model that shows how you will support your line manager to operate as its best.

### **My perfect team**

Make a model that shows your perfect team.  
Build a model that shows how you will support your team to operate as its best.

### **My future life**

Build a model that shows where you would like to be in 3/5 years?  
Create a mini model that shows how you would feel achieving this.  
What could you do to get there? Capture your ideas in mini models.

## Section B: Professional development for coaches and mentors

Some of the activities in the previous section may also be useful as professional development; they may be used in supervision, or support groups and internal workshops or through CPD networks. Whichever ones you adopt it is important to be mindful of the professional expectations of coaches.

The Global Code of Ethics for Coaches and Mentors is available at [http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EMCC/Global\\_Code\\_of\\_Ethics.pdf](http://www.emccouncil.org/webimages/EMCC/Global_Code_of_Ethics.pdf)

Table 3.6 Ethics for Coaches and Mentors (adapted from EMCC Council, online)

Working with clients	Professional conduct	Excellent practice
Context Contracting Integrity Confidentiality Inappropriate interactions Conflict of interest Terminating professional relationships & on-going responsibilities	Maintaining the reputation of coaching and mentoring Recognising equality and diversity Breaches of professional conduct Legal and statutory obligations and duties	Ability to perform On-going supervision Continuing professional development and reflection

### Working with clients

As we have said in several other places already, these prompts are starter questions/suggestions/builds. We obviously expect that you will explore and probe the subject appropriately with additional/follow up questions, as you would in any normal coaching situations. Previous sections and prompts have given illustrations of what these follow ups might look like (what did that feel like? How did you know X? What other ways can you think of to address this problem/interpret this issue? Etc)

#### Context

Build a model that shows the context you are working in.

Build a model that depicts the diversity among your clients. What does this mean to you?

#### Contracting

Build a model that shows the strategies you use for contracting.

Add a red brick to highlight a specific challenge in this process.

Build three mini models of your options to overcome this challenge.

Share the one you commit to take forward.

#### Integrity

Build a model that shows what integrity means to you.

What else would you add? Modify your model.

Share the change you made to your model with at least one person.

#### Confidentiality

Build a model that shows the importance of confidentiality.

What could you do to refine your approach. Build three mini models to show this.

### **Inappropriate interactions**

Build a model that shows inappropriate interactions in a coaching context.  
Build three mini models that shows what strategies can be deployed to avoid inappropriate interactions?

With a partner, build a model of an anonymous and unrecognisable coaching dilemma you have faced. How did you handle it? What other strategies or observations might you suggest to each other through additional models?

### **Conflict of interest**

Build a model that shows a situation where there was a conflict of interest.  
Build a mini model that shows what it did.

### **Terminating professional relationships & on-going responsibilities**

Build a model that shows a situation where you terminated a professional relationship/one with on-going responsibilities.

Build a mini model of an effective strategy to do this.

Build a shared model that incorporates all ideas.

### **Professional conduct**

Build a model that depicts what it means to be a professional.

Reflect on your model and check if you would like to make any changes or additions to your model.

Share the changes you made with at least one person"

### **Maintaining the reputation of coaching and mentoring**

Build a model that shows how you contribute to maintain a professional standards in coaching/mentoring.

Add a green brick to highlight your most important responsibility.

### **Recognising equality and diversity**

Build a model that shows what diversity looks like for you.

Build a second model that shows what equality means to you.

Create shared models of your individual diversity and equality models.

### **Breaches of professional conduct**

Build a mini model that she was what you understand by breaching professional conduct.

Build a shared model that synthesises all your responses.

### **Legal and statutory obligations and duties**

(group setting)

Build a model that shows your legal and statutory obligations and duties as a coach.

Build a landscape that shows your collective understanding and the relationships among different aspects each individual contributed.

### **Excellent practice**

Build a model to celebrate key successes in your coaching practice.

Build a model that shows how success looks like for you.

### **Ability to perform**

Build two mini models that show your ability to perform. one should depict a key enabler and the other a blocker.  
What can you do about the blocker? Build three mini models to explore options.

### **Ongoing supervision**

Build a model that shows how you supervise.  
Identify one aspect that could be enhanced further.

### **Continuing professional development and reflection**

Build a model that shows your professional development activities in the last year.  
Add a green brick to identify which helped you the most  
What else could you try?

### 3.7 Prompts for research

In this section, you will find a wide range of activities all relating to research as an academic activity and process, the professional development of researchers (Vitae®) but also a series of activities that will help doctoral students prepare for their viva in a more hands-on and creative way. The sub-sections are:

Section A: Activities supporting researcher professional development (Vitae®)

Section B: Activities supporting research activities

Section C: Activities supporting viva preparation

#### Section A: Activities supporting researcher professional development (Vitae®)

The Researcher Development Framework developed by Vitae® is a valuable tool for postgraduate researchers' development, their supervisors as well as other researchers and their ongoing professional development. The framework has four domains. The suggested LEGO-based activities presented below are aligned to these and their sub-domains (see Table 3.7).

The Researcher Development Framework developed by Vitae® can be accessed at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework/developing-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>

Table 3.7 Overview of the Vitae® Researcher Development Framework (online)

Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities	Domain B: Personal effectiveness	Domain C: Research governance and organisation	Domain D: Engagement, influence and impact
A1 Knowledge base A2 Cognitive abilities A3 Creativity	B1 Personal qualities B2 Self- management B3 Professional and career development	C1 Professional conduct C2 Research management C3 Finance, funding and resources	D1 Working with others D2 Communication and dissemination D3 Engagement and impact

#### Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities

##### A1 Knowledge base

Build a model that shows your current understanding of the area you intend to study. Build another model that shows specific areas for development to help you with the process you will decide to follow.

Add a red brick to your top priority area and share.

##### A2 Cognitive abilities

Build a model that shows your current critical and creative thinking capacity in the context of your research.

What else would help to increase your capacity and capability in this area? Create three mini models that capture your ideas.

##### A3 Creativity

Build a model that shows your creative thinking capacity in the context of your research.

What else would help to increase your capacity and capability in this area? Create three mini models that capture your ideas.

## **Domain B: Personal effectiveness**

### **B1 Personal qualities**

Build a model that shows what kind of researcher you are. What qualities do you bring to research?

What qualities or capacities do you need to develop? Identify three priorities and capture these in three mini models.

### **B2 Self-management**

Build a model that shows your current skills to manage your research.

Add a red brick to the area that is your biggest challenge.

Create a mini model for somebody else in the group to suggest how their challenge can be overcome.

### **B3 Professional and career development**

Build a model that captures your current skills as a researcher.

Build a model that captures the skills, attitudes and behaviours you need to develop as a researcher.

Bring together all your needs into a single 'landscape' and show the connections/resonances and differences between your models

## **Domain C: Research governance and organisation**

### **C1 Professional conduct**

Build a model that shows how you deal with your research in a professional manner.

Create a shared models that brings your practices as a group together.

### **C2 Research management**

Build a model that shows your current skills, attitudes and behaviours that you use to manage your research project.

Add a green brick to what works and a red brick to what you find especially challenging.

What could you do to address this challenge? Build three mini models.

### **C3 Finance, funding and resources**

Build a model that shows how you go about financing/funding/resourcing your research.

What is your biggest strength in this area? Add a green brick to your model.

What is your biggest challenge? Add a red brick to your model.

## **Domain D: Engagement, influence and impact**

### **D1 Working with others**

Build a model that shows the skills, attitudes and behaviours you use when collaborating with/mentor/supervise/lead others.

Add a red brick to the area you need to develop further.

### **D2 Communication and dissemination**

Build a model that shows the strategies you use to communicate your research.  
What else could you try? Create as many mini models as possible.  
Share up to three mini models with at least one other person.

### **D3 Engagement and impact**

Build a model that shows what strategies you use to engage as a researcher more widely so that your research has an impact.  
Create a shared model bringing practices from the whole group together.

## **Section B: Activities supporting research activities**

Researchers who would like to explore specific aspects of research linked to a specific project, plan or current activity, on their own or with others, or are interested in helping colleagues develop capacity in a specific area, might find the following activities useful for a workshop, one-to-one settings or for self-analysis and reflection.

### **Planning research**

Build a model that shows what steps you need to consider when planning your study.  
What will be your biggest challenge? Mark it using a red brick.

### **Research proposal**

Build a model that shows what you need to consider when planning to put a research proposal together.  
With what do you need help? Mark it on your model using a red brick.

### **Research questions**

Build between one and three mini models that show what you want to find out from this study.  
Which one is the most important mini model for you? Build another mini model to illustrate what this means to you.

### **Support**

Build a model that shows what support you need to make progress and complete your research project.  
What help can you realistically get? Use a green brick and add to the specific areas on your model.  
Re-build your models with the support you can get.

### **Funding**

Build a model that shows where you can seek funding for your project.  
What else could you try? Create a few further mini models.  
Share the mini models and commit to what you are going to do regarding funding for your project.

### **Methodology**

Build a few mini models that show the methodologies you consider using in your study.  
Which one is your strongest contender? Add the advantages of one of the methodologies you selected to the relevant mini model.



**Literature review**

Build a model that shows the literature you intend to review for your study.  
What could you do differently? Create three mini models that show your ideas.  
Share the mini models and commit to one change as illustrated through one of your mini models.

**Data collection**

Build a model that shows the process you followed to collect data for your study.  
What would be the ideal way of collecting data if you could

**Findings**

Build a model that shows your key findings and how they related to each other.

**Discoveries made through the project**

Build up to three mini models that show specific discoveries you made during this project.

Select one of the mini models and create a further model that shows where this discovery could take you.

**Research design**

Build a model that shows the key features of your research design.  
How would your ideal research design look like? What modifications would you do to your original model? Make them.

**Dissemination**

Build a model for your project dissemination strategy.  
Add a red brick to identify your biggest challenge.

**Reflection on completed research project**

Build a model that shows your journey from the beginning until the end.  
Highlight three things you are proud of.  
Use a red brick to identify on your model one thing you would do differently in another project.  
Share the red brick area and explain.

**Section C: Activities supporting viva preparation**

A viva can be a stressful experience while preparing for it and during it. There are many useful guides and resources available online that help doctoral students prepare for their big day. However, more creative approaches could also be considered, such as LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. Below you will find a series of activities that are based on commonly asked questions during a viva. These can be further personalised and contextualised by the doctoral researcher and their supervisory team and used perhaps in advance of a mock viva. Some of the activities could lead doctoral students to consider bringing a small LEGO kit into the viva and using this to respond to one of the questions raised by the examiners using a model that they have prepared earlier. Doctoral students could also make a model on the spot when asked a specific question that is complex and needs to be explained with clarity. Making such a model, could provide a valuable reflective tool

and help the doctoral students to stay focused and articulate with precision the key points.

### **Motivation for the study**

Build a model that shows your main motivation to conduct this study.

### **Literature review strategies**

Build a model that shows what strategies you used to conduct the literature review.

Build a mini model that shows what you would do differently and why looking back at the completed study now.

### **Literature review**

Build a model that shows the key areas of the literature you explored and how these link to your study.

Build as many mini models as needed to show the gaps you found in the literature.

### **Theoretical framework**

Build a model that shows key features of your theoretical framework.

### **Your research design**

Build a model that shows all the elements of your research design holistically.

### **Your methodology**

Build a model that shows key characteristics of your methodology.

Add a red brick to the biggest challenge you faced linked to this.

Add a green brick to highlight the benefit for using this methodology for your study.

What other methodology could you have chosen? Create at least one mini models that depicts this.

### **Data analysis**

Build a model that shows the process you followed to analyse your data.

Add a red brick to the area of the model that shows your biggest challenge. How did you overcome this?

### **Findings**

Build a model that shows the key findings of your study.

Show on your model how the findings are linked to each other through using connectors.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

Build a model that showcases the unique contribution you are making through your study.

What are you most proud of? Add a green brick to the specific area.

### **Implications**

Build a model that shows the implications of your findings.

What do you consider the biggest opportunity? Make a mini model to depict this.

What do you consider the biggest challenge? Make a mini model to depict this.

### **Research journey**

Build a model that shows key milestones of your research journey and what you have learnt.

### **Emerging work**

Build a model that shows key developments in your area since submitting your thesis.

What do you regard as the most significant? Add a red brick to the area of your model that depicts this.

Share the red brick area and explain what this means for your work.

### **Dissemination**

Create a model that is a dissemination map of your work. What could you do? Add a green brick to the area on your model that shows what you will do first.

This booklet concludes with Part 4 which illustrates some examples of how activities using LEGO or inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® can be adapted to suit different needs.

### **3.8. Design tips**

Here you will find a few aspects to consider when designing your own activities, and they are ones which we have already mentioned earlier:

When planning your activities remember

the purpose, context, timing, nature of participants, numbers and size of group, how you might share, the space you are working in, wider module or learning framework and many more.

### **Working in pairs and groups**

You might want to use some of the activities with smaller or larger groups. Think about time and what is realistically possible and desirable in each situation. Depending on the purpose of the activities and what you are hoping to achieve, consider sharing of the models to happen within smaller groups or even in pairs. Some of the activities might also provide useful for self-reflection and could therefore be used on one's own or in pairs. Identify each time what would be the most appropriate approach and remember that a form of sharing of the reflection is extremely important and valuable. In the case of using suggested LEGO activities on your own, as self-reflection or evaluation, it might be possible to combine this with externalising the reflection through a blog post, a video clip or an audio file that can be shared and invite others to comment and therefore turn the monologue into a dialogue, a conversation.

### **What about kits?**

As already stated, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities often depend on all participants to have access to certain kits or types of bricks for particular

applications. We have found through our own practice, and no doubt because of the financial constraints experienced in higher education, that this is a luxury that we cannot always afford. As a result many educators using LEGO have put together their own collection of bricks and re-use them regularly. These also work well as their use is predicated on the fact that that it is not about the bricks, but about the conversations they enable. David Gauntlett is also one who has been exploring the potential for working with a much smaller number of bricks; this can be seen as an opportunity to be more resourceful and see what kinds of ideas can be expressed according to the motto "less is more", rather than seeing a limited number of bricks as a barrier to richer expression.

## **PART 4: Variations on LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, by Chrissi**

Within this section, I (Chrissi) will share my thinking around the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and further ways to use LEGO more broadly. This exploration is leading to possible alternative opportunities based on some of the characteristics of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method as well as with other creative methods such as making artefacts and representing abstract ideas visually using a range of materials.

The intention is to create further playful learning opportunities through making models with and without LEGO bricks. As the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method has been made available as open source since 2010, it is natural that individuals will critically reflect on the existing method and adapt this further to suit their needs while also exploring new possibilities and being creative with the method itself. After all, as Professor Johan R. Ross said in his prologue, “LSP is about freedom”. My explorations are based on experimental applications from my own practice partially linked to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® but also further playful and model-making approaches Alison and I have used in higher education. I am sharing my thoughts on these to initiate a dialogue, debate and inquiry to move our thinking into new directions and explore alternative possibilities in the area of playful learning through making.

I would like to introduce my thoughts around facilitation, participants and the materials used in LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®.

### **4.1 Facilitation**

According to the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method, the facilitator leads and directs activities without participating in these (Rasmussen, 2006). The questions are prepared and posed by the facilitator (The LEGO Group, 2010; Frick *et al.*, 2013) and form part of their workshop preparation and construction. While this is of value and enables the facilitator to carefully orchestrate the session to maximise engagement and output, it still models a facilitator-directed and -driven approach to learning and development. There are opportunities to explore the use of questions that are generated from the group itself based on an agreed theme and allow a more responsive workshop with looser structures more owned by the participants themselves. This change would potentially increase motivation and empower learners further but does require a skilful facilitator, able to translate their questions into valuable LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities.

The facilitator of a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop is often an outsider who has been brought in to work with a group of individuals who they don't know. Therefore, they might be expected to be objective and neutral. It is also important to acknowledge that a facilitator is invited to offer a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session based on trust relationships. This can be an advantage when working with teams where there are internal challenges and sensitive issues uncovered. However, in some situations an outsider might not be what would work best. For example, if an educator would like to get to know their students, finding ways where the educator and students become one united community is important to develop fruitful relationships. This would be difficult to achieve if the educator facilitates a workshop without participating in this themselves. In this case, asking students to open up and share their personal stories is equally important with the educator doing the same.

One possibility would be to bring a facilitator external to this group to facilitate the workshop and ask the educator to participate. This is not always possible or appropriate due to resources, cost and the pedagogical rationale where perhaps an outsider may be seen as an intruder and have a negative impact on the group.

My suggestion therefore is for the educator to fully participate in the activities as well as introduce the role of the rotating facilitator where appropriate and useful. The idea of a rotating facilitator is borrowed from Problem-Based Learning (PBL), where students are asked to take on roles when working on a specific PBL activity which are dynamic and change from one activity to the other helping them each time to develop different capabilities. The educator might be the first to lead a round of activities, especially if the group is new to the method, and later passes the baton to a student. This means that progressively the educator blends into the community, becomes one with the community and empowers students to take the lead in the discussions. What I am suggesting enables participation by all and encourages students to take responsibility of their own experiences and learning as they are unfolding. What makes this happen effectively are the questioning techniques used as well as a positive and playful atmosphere and not just the LEGO bricks. So investing some time with students on developing questioning techniques that foster openness and inquiry, such as Socratic questioning, many of which are also widely used in coaching, will be time worth spend with students or staff when embarking on using playful model-making techniques for example.

#### **4.2 Participation**

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® builds on the power of the collective that fosters participation by all present, except the facilitator it seems, who is normally the outsider, as mentioned above. The method works well with small groups and there are also techniques that can facilitate the effective use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® with larger groups. How a group is facilitated and by how many, as a whole, split into smaller groups, pairs or using a mix of strategies, depends on the objectives of an LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session or activity as well as the time available. Whatever the size of the group, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® seems usually to be mentioned as an application that is used in a group context (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014).

There are, however, further opportunities to use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®- type activities in other situations with individuals, pairs or smaller groups. Such opportunities are located within learning, teaching and research. For example, personal tutoring scenarios, supervisory meetings, individual assessment, coaching and mentoring as well as research interviews and professional discussions. It is common that these are conducted as individual meetings. In these cases, the tutor, mentor, coach or researcher would act as the facilitator. The student, colleague or member of the public then, depending on the purpose of the meeting, is the lone participant who builds models in response to facilitator prompts which are then shared and discussed to gain insights.

However, there is also the possibility that such activities are of reciprocal nature, where the facilitator and the participant are equals and not necessarily in power-relationships (although this is not excluded). Examples include paired peer-to-peer situations with both parties fully participating. In some cases, facilitation can happen in turns. This approach might also be of value when establishing tutor-tutee

relationships for example where two-sided opening-up has the potential for individuals to better understand each other which is vital for a professional relationship to form.

Furthermore, using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in pairs or small groups may be desirable or seen as more effective in a large group setting such as a class of students that consists of 30, 100 or more students, as it would enable interaction and shared reflection within these large group settings in a playful way that would enable individuals to open-up and feel more connected to some of their peers and progressively help them build and strengthen relationships which may influence their engagement and learning on a course and make their experience more personal in a large group learning situation.

#### **4.3 Material: With and without LEGO**

LEGO is a versatile play resource, toy and tool that aids our imagination to express in a very visual way through constructing models (Rasmussen, 2006). However, it is often said that it is not about the bricks, but what the bricks enable. (The same is often said about technology). This raises some radical questions:

What if, we didn't have any LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® kits? What if we didn't have the money to invest in these? What if, we didn't want to use LEGO bricks at all? What if we didn't have any LEGO bricks? Could the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method still work or a variation of it without the use of LEGO and where could this take us? Elkind (2007, 15) says that "The majority of toys are now plastic. These playthings generally lack the warmth of wood, the texture of natural fabrics such as cotton or wool, or the solidity of metal." LEGO is such a toy. I am taking the philosophical skeleton of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and test it out with other materials and adaptations through which a new method emerges.

There are good arguments for using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® kits or LEGO but what if we don't have any for example or we would like to use different materials to create a more sensory rich building experience beyond a homogenous LEGO approach? Everybody can build using LEGO bricks. Even if somebody hasn't used them before, it will only take a few minutes to work out how to use the bricks even without instructions, just by playing with them. This is one of the key reasons why many argue that LEGO works so well (Rasmussen, 2006). Could the same be said about other materials?

What could other materials add?

We know that LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not about creating aesthetically pleasing models. It is not about the models but what they represent for the builder. However, if we are truly interested in what the models represent and not their looks, what stops us from using different materials to create these? Since the artistic side of our creations is not what matters, what makes LEGO so different from play dough or just paper for example? I have found that a big bonus of LEGO is that it can easily be re-used and there is no wastage or very limited. Despite the fact that the bricks are made of plastic, I would argue that they are sustainable learning and teaching resources as they can be used again and again. Furthermore, I would like to add that the warm-up activities within LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® evidence that everybody

can use LEGO bricks and build something in contrary to drawing for example where individuals might say or think that they are not artistic and can't draw. Sometimes, however, there is self-doubt expressed by a small minority of participants about their capacity to build a model out of LEGO bricks.

While, I have been using LEGO bricks to organise and facilitate LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops, I have also been challenging this idea and often mix LEGO bricks with different materials, including play dough, pipe cleaners, balloons as well as paper and items we find in nature such as sticks, pebbles and leaves and other resources that can be used to create physical and digital models. It is liberating when we are resourceful and use our imagination to come up with novel ideas for learning and teaching more generally and what we use to build models too. I would also challenge the fact that the facilitator decides what to use. How about the participants deciding for themselves? We emphasise on choice, but often we are the ones making choices for others. How can we turn this around? How can we empower others to make choices that help them express as individuals and learn?

#### **4.4 Virtual LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops**

While LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops are traditionally organised in face-to-face settings, it is also possible to offer them remotely using webinar technologies and a webcam. In this way participants and facilitator can see each other and the LEGO models they create using physical bricks and discuss these.

There is also the digital LEGO model maker site Build with Chrome available at <https://www.buildwithchrome.com/>. This can be used instead of physical bricks when the facilitator decides this would be more appropriate or would like to try a different way to offer a LEGO-based activity and/or physical or virtual workshop. It needs to be noted that participants may need more time to familiarise themselves with this 3D LEGO building technology that when asked to use physical LEGO bricks before fully engaging in such an activity. Therefore enough time for this needs to be planned in, so that the technology doesn't become a barrier for engagement in the activity.

#### **4.5 Now what?**

Play frees our imagination (Brown, 2010) and enables us to experience learning, teaching, professional development, research and coaching in immersive and stimulating ways.

Using and adapting the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method for practice in a range of HE contexts, creates new opportunities for playful, creative and critical participation and expression that help us make new discoveries about ourselves, others and the world around us. The explorative practices shared in this part of the booklet are driven by curiosity and the desire to explore, experiment and discover stimulating ways to engage students and staff in learning and development that stretch them and also build community. Through some of the explorations LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® as a method, may become less recognisable. This could then mean the experimentation may lead to a new method inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®.

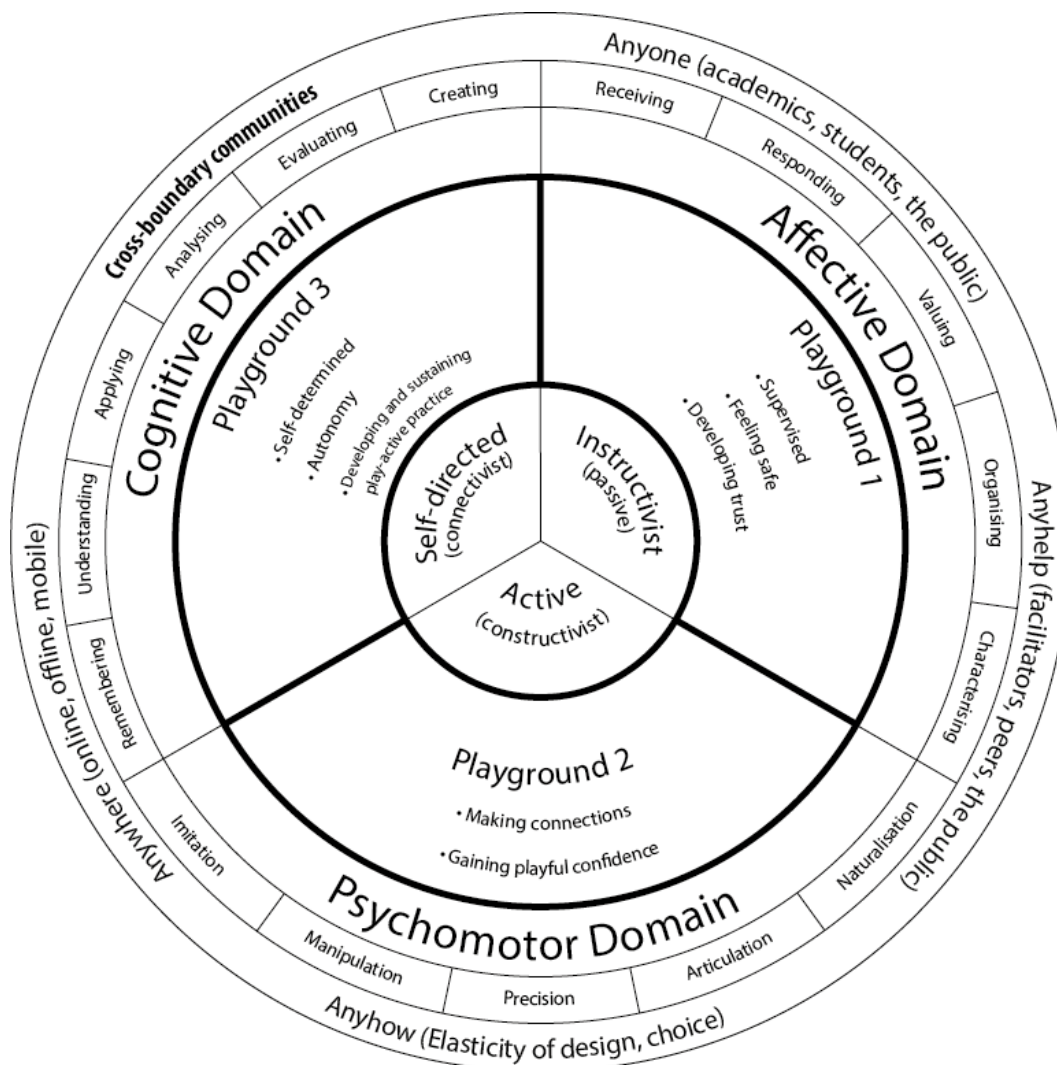
I have started conceptualising and developing a new method which I have baptised **Play-Make-Discover (PlayMaD)**. This has some characteristics of the LEGO®



SERIOUS PLAY® method but also other approaches and materials as indicated earlier. PlayMaD creates new opportunities for flexible and creative participation and expression using a range of playful and making approaches, resources and materials that can be used depending on their availability and suitability of a specific complex or tricky learning situation.

Taking the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® premise and combining it with other creative inquiry-based approaches, frameworks and models can be generative, as novel combination often lead us to new surprising and valuable discoveries.

We know that frameworks and models are useful design tools for the enhancement and transformation of practices. The Playground model (Nerantzi, 2015; Nerantzi 2019) developed to promote creative learning and teaching through play in an academic development setting (see Figure 1), might be useful to explore when considering integrating playful learning and particularly LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. The model may provide a scaffold when considering integrating LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® activities at different stages of a workshop or course.



**Figure 1.** The Playground model positioned in a wider theoretical framework

Workshops with LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® begin with the building of individual models which give a representation of the builder's conception. The use of LEGO bricks shifts the language of expression of the learner. New language leads to new thinking and as such the learner is less likely to reproduce learned or expected responses. Instead their responses are more visceral. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method allows these individual models to be combined or integrated into a new shared model which represents the shared understanding of the group. It is through this process that deep conceptions and misconceptions can be brought to the table and through exposition, conflict and resolution, familiar concepts to storytellers, new knowledge and understanding is co-constructed within that community.

The ideas shared in this section evidence that variations on the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method can be made and are made in practice in response to a specific situation and based on an informed rationale. Furthermore, there are opportunities to extend the philosophy behind the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method to construct new models and framework, such as PlayMaD, the one presented briefly here. Further research is needed to test it in practice and evaluate it.

## **PART 5: Conclusions and further conversations**

By now you should have a clear understanding, we hope, of the benefits of using LEGO-based techniques in many different forms. You will be familiar now, if you were not before, of the principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, where to find more information on it, and also of the respect and high regard we and contributors to this booklet have for the method. We, as editors of this booklet and as academic practitioners, are both committed to creative, playful and alternative approaches to teaching and learning. We advocate that these are just as relevant and important for complex tertiary learning as they are in schools.

We are therefore interested in integrating the use of LEGO and principles inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® into different teaching media, and with other approaches.

Remember to adopt an enquiry-based approach also to evaluate the use of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in HE and discover new insights that are valuable to be shared with the wider academic community.

Here is a bonus task for you: After engaging with the booklet and ideas about the different LEGO-based approaches, create a mini model that shows what they enable you to do and share it with us via social media using #LEGOinHE.

If you have suggestions about how this booklet could be improved further and/or would like to help in the creation of some of the planned additional outputs, please get in touch with Chrissi ([c.nerantzi@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.nerantzi@mmu.ac.uk)).

### **Epilogue by Professor Sally Brown: Playing to learn, learning to play**

I spend a lot of my life playing, both for pedagogic purposes and just for fun and am firmly convinced of the power of the ludic principle. Learning through serious play can offer a semi-structured environment to aid reflection (especially for the reluctant or unconvinced of the power of self-review) by enabling symbolic representation of complex ideas in a neutral context. We engage most productively when we are 'Learning by Doing as Race', (2015) argues, since theoretical abstractions become more real through concrete experimentation, for example, using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, as this booklet demonstrates. This is illustrated through the diverse and thoughtful range of stories in Part 2 and through the Activity prompts in Part 3 and throughout the booklet, which is how the authors bring their ideas to life and show how these can be used in practice.

Approaches vary substantially, from highly structured and expertly-facilitated formats, to more free-form approaches, requiring participants to be creative in their usage of random bricks: there is in my view, no single correct way, but many brilliant and productive ones.

While independent practice is productive and thought-provoking, for me the greatest value of the approach is in fostering democratic co-construction, whereby sometimes ill-formulated ideas or conflicting can be collaboratively articulated, shared and developed, simultaneously building communications and acting as a fertile tool for forward planning. Working with others using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® encourages and facilitates the essential capabilities of collaboration and co-production and there are ample prompts to encourage this in this booklet.

Watching adults play purposefully is much like watching small children do the same: I like the way that approximations of concepts can become metaphorically translated into active paradigms which can help to create meaning. I like the way play requires non-literal and left-field approaches, moving us out of formulaic responses. And I like the way play makes people laugh, making learning, such a central human process, a pleasure rather than drudgery. That's what this publication is all about.

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